

## Global Issues Breakout Session

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### Overview

An essential tool to combat the tobacco industry's aggressive targeting of women is accurate, timely information. But worldwide, the reasons for the relatively low prevalence of tobacco use among women (about 12 percent) and high prevalence among men (about 48 percent) are difficult to identify, especially in developing countries where reliable surveillance and monitoring data are generally absent (1, 2). Similarly, little information exists on the social, cultural, and economic context of gender and tobacco related to the variety of tobacco used and methods of tobacco initiation, uptake, and prevention (3). And, while recent global surveys have reported data on women and smoking, gaps in data collection make it difficult to monitor progress or develop national tobacco control plans (4, 5). For example, in many regions, including Africa, Asia, and the Eastern Mediterranean, other ways to use tobacco, such as in hookahs and rolled tobacco, are popular but seldom included in national surveys (4). As the rates of tobacco use among women and girls rise, improving scientific research about gender and tobacco becomes an urgent matter. Adult smoking prevalence is higher among women than men in the five countries of the Cook Islands, Nauru, Norway, Papua New Guinea, and Sweden, and recent increases in female smoking prevalence have been reported in Cambodia, Malaysia, and Bangladesh (4).

The World Health Organization (WHO) Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (Framework Convention) is an international public health treaty that is legally binding on all parties. Adopted by the WHO World Health Assembly in May 2003, it will go into force once 40 countries have

ratified it. The Framework Convention promises to stimulate demand for better and more data on important issues, including price structure and advertising expenditures (6). Long-term improvements in national databases will progress as governments that ratify the treaty report to an international monitoring body. Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), such as the Framework Convention Alliance (an NGO network whose primary objective is to support the development of a strong Framework Convention and related protocols), will also seek to conduct better research in order to submit shadow reports. However, gender analysis in tobacco control research needs stronger financial and political support to ensure high-quality national reporting. The tobacco control movement can expand its organizational and financial resources by reaching out to new partners among women's organizations, health care professionals, nurses, unions, and human rights and environmental groups.

Funders, government agencies, and NGOs in the United States have important roles to play in assisting developing countries. Best practices in the United States should be shared, but adapted to the cultural, social, and economic needs of local communities. For example, mass-media campaigns can be modified in countries where community leaders have more influence than print media among illiterate women. Bearing in mind the need to strengthen leadership from developing countries, greater efforts must also be made to exchange knowledge and success stories between economically developed and developing countries.

## Recommendations

### Research

#### \*1. Surveillance and monitoring.

The working group gave highest priority to strengthening national surveillance, including monitoring trends in tobacco use, changing patterns of use, and factors that affect use (4).

Possible research questions are:

- *What evidence exists to show that rates of tobacco use are increasing rapidly among girls?*
- *Do gender differences exist in response to changes in taxation policies?*

Research on uptake should cover new patterns, such as the use of smokeless tobacco among youth. Standardized survey questions could be based on norms for populations in industrialized countries—as long as they are adapted to developing countries' cultures and tobacco use patterns. Although using common definitions is often a complex matter, the effort to do so will improve comparability on a global basis, as well as the ability to conduct meta-analyses. The Global Youth Tobacco Survey is an example of how trends around the world can be monitored (6).

Examples of specific research topics include:

- *Behavior of the tobacco industry.* One area of surveillance that is too often omitted by health officials is tracking the tobacco industry's behavior. For example, data on advertising and promotion expenditures like those reported by the U.S. Federal Trade Commission do not exist in most developing countries. As marketing, product design, and promotion influence susceptibility to and initiation of smoking, understanding the behavior of the tobacco industry will prove essential in designing public policies (7). Such information can also arm tobacco control advocates with evidence to mobilize women's organizations and warn them of tactics used by the tobacco industry to "buy" their loyalty (8). Another justification for further research on this topic is that tobacco industry data related to marketing are useful in litigation (9).
- *A map of who uses which tobacco products by country and changing patterns of use.* Basic information concerning the variety of tobacco products used by women, such as chewing tobacco and that used in hookahs, is

generally absent, as are data on changing patterns of use related to marketing of products. In addition, little information is available on tobacco use among female nurses and doctors. The WHO has begun to address this issue through collaboration with the World Medical Association and International Council of Nurses to monitor tobacco use among health professionals in Bahrain, Iran, Kuwait, Oman, and the Republic of Korea (4). Research that maps national trends is vital to developing gender-sensitive counter-advertising campaigns.

- *Factors contributing to the uptake of tobacco use where prevalence is low among women and protective factors now exist.* Research on nonsmokers by gender and age would yield data on initiation, quitting, and acceptable prevention methods. Little is known about what makes young women choose not to smoke even when they are exposed to tobacco advertisements and promotions. A research question might be: What factors differentiate teenage girls who smoke from those in the same social and economic environments who do not? An important supplement to conventional epidemiological surveillance is monitoring cultural and social factors that protect women against tobacco use (keeping in mind that the objective is to uphold women's freedoms as well as prevent tobacco uptake). Factors to consider are traditional values, lack of disposable income, life skills that prevent women from using tobacco, and family pressure. A historical perspective is useful, such as comparing traditional and new gender norms as they relate to changes in tobacco use. These data are needed to maintain low prevalence rates among women and girls as an integral part of public policy.
- *The meaning of tobacco use to women.* In developing countries, the meanings of tobacco use to women, such as independent self-image and rebellion, are important to understand in their historical social context. Researchable topics would include:
  - ◆ How do women interpret package designs that promote images of glamorous Western women?
  - ◆ Do health education programs address gender issues adequately?

\* Recommendations with an asterisk are those identified by the breakout groups as their top three recommendations.

Investigation of the knowledge, attitudes, and practices of women who use smokeless tobacco is also important, particularly in developing countries. In India, for example, some rural women are reported to believe that chewing tobacco is healthy (10).

### Disparities

If more accurate and timely data were available, tobacco control advocacy groups could create a call for action based on evidence that women are being targeted. National programs would know where to intervene for the highest impact and how to reduce disparities such as those affecting American Indian populations.

### Partners

Partners should be involved in collecting, funding, disseminating, and using research. Among the potential partners are these agencies and organizations:

- Federal Trade Commission
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
- National Institutes of Health/Fogarty International Center
- American Cancer Society
- International Union Against Cancer
- U.S. Agency for International Development
- American Legacy Foundation

National agencies in developing countries, such as the Centers for Disease Control in China and the National Cancer Institute in Brazil, are also partners, both as users and sponsors of research. A stimulus for global cooperation concerning gender and tobacco will also come from the Framework Convention, because the countries that ratify the treaty will report on progress made. Linkages of these and U.S. partners with the international women's movement and research centers will be critical to monitoring and evaluating programs. However, more effort must be made to include women's NGOs, health care professionals, national ministries for women's affairs, national centers of excellence that teach gender studies, and women's studies centers—particularly in developing countries. Finally, many international development and funding agencies can cooperate, such as the WHO, United Nations regional economic and social commissions, and the World Bank.

### Impact

One impact of improving research would be the creation of baselines for monitoring the Framework Convention and establishing global indicators on gender and tobacco. The number of high-quality grant applications from researchers in developing countries for research on gender and tobacco could increase as more data become available on measurable outcomes. Better data can also have a positive political impact, since children's rights organizations and women's groups will need evidence to be persuaded to join the tobacco control movement.

### \*2. Policy-related research.

Data are seldom rigorous enough to convince policy makers in developing countries that tobacco control measures are successful. Two major areas of concern should be the progress of Framework Convention implementation (including tax/price, advertising/promotion, labeling, and environmental tobacco smoke) and multicountry studies of national and local policies designed for international comparisons (11).

This research would also help answer questions such as:

- *If countries enforce a total ban on advertising, what happens?*
- *What is the impact of legislation on environmental tobacco smoke on women's health?*

Examples of specific research issues are:

- *Awareness and risk behavior.* Levels of awareness and risk behavior among women vary widely by social, economic, and cultural context—even within a country—and subgroups should be identified in policy-related research. For example, although many urban dwellers with access to modern communication systems may be aware of the health hazards of passive smoke, health messages may fail to reach the majority of women living in poor, rural areas. In addition, ethnic, religious, and linguistic diversity can act as communication barriers and affect levels of awareness among women and girls.
- *Impact of the Framework Convention.* The feasibility studies and evaluation and monitoring of policies resulting from enforcement of the Framework Convention should be built into a gender and tobacco strategy. Multicountry studies that measure the impact of specific measures, such as changes in taxation and price, on women's tobacco use will provide important comparative data. Accurate evaluations are also needed

of new legislation, such as bans on smoking in work- and public places. Also, women's health as a human right is an important issue in the Framework Convention that needs close monitoring (12).

- *The role of law and governance.* Tobacco control programs should conduct research to improve legal and governance structures for tobacco control. For example, the report on the history of Thailand's tobacco control program emphasized the importance of accurate reports and evaluations of law enforcement (13). Monitoring and evaluating existing and new laws is necessary to ensure compliance and identify reasons for non-enforcement. Questions arise about how to use public opinion to assist law enforcement agencies. Other research questions are:
  - ◆ What do countries need most to draw upon the U.S. experience in litigation and corporate responsibility?
  - ◆ Does women's participation in decision making help improve the implementation of national policies?
- *Communications and media outreach.* Research is needed to develop culturally relevant messages and entry points that respond to women's perceived needs. For example, data concerning the impact of maternal and paternal smoking on fetal health in countries such as Korea, Kenya, and Vietnam would arouse public interest and provide an entry point to maternal and child health and tobacco programs. The role of men in the protection of women's health also needs further investigation. For example, in many developing countries where it is difficult for women to influence public policy or defend their right to a smoke-free environment, communications research should target men.
- *Media literacy.* Counter-advertising can work, but better methods are needed to decode and debunk industry messages and counter their persuasive power (7). Redefining women's liberation should take into account women's own perceptions, and the tobacco industry must be prevented from "owning" gender images of modernity. The ultimate goal should be to use media and communication strategies to create demand for prevention and cessation. An example is the U.K. Health Education Authority's "Put smoking out of fashion" project that involved the fashion industry and media in a teen antismoking effort (14).
- *Women as tobacco workers.* A major gap in research lies in the impact of tobacco production and processing

on women tobacco workers (15). In many tobacco-producing countries, women and girls who work on tobacco farms are exposed to environmental hazards such as pesticides, and their labor is exploited under poor working conditions (16). Epidemiological and surveillance data, as well as social, economic, and cultural research, are needed to develop appropriate health policies for these workers. Priority should be given to their knowledge, attitudes, and practices related to risk behavior. Data on reproductive health are also poorly collected.

### Disparities

Improving policy-related research would contribute to earlier intervention in the tobacco epidemic curve. Targeting diverse groups of women and girls with gender-sensitive interventions could be more effectively planned.

### Partners

Research partners would be similar to those already mentioned for surveillance. In addition, United Nations (UN) agencies committed to strengthening policies related to women's health as a human right, such as the Commission on the Status of Women, the UN Division for the Advancement of Women, and funders of women's and development projects, should become more involved. A positive step was taken by the Swedish International Development Agency to support gender and tobacco research. In cooperation with the government of South Africa and the Women's Health Project, the Swedish International Development Agency sponsored seven studies in the region and will fund Africa's first regional meeting on gender and tobacco.

### Impact

As with surveillance, policy-related research would arm advocates to hold governments accountable for treaty implementation. NGOs can also use information to "shame" governments into taking action and increasing awareness in the public about the importance of gender-based policies. Tobacco control programs could target advocacy to policies that work best to reduce tobacco use among women and girls.

### Translation

#### \*3. Make research data available to policy makers and the public.

More efforts are needed to make data on surveillance and policy research, as well as those from social, economic, and cultural studies, available to policy makers and the public. In particular, international cooperation in research must respond

to rapidly changing political challenges posed by the tobacco industry in an attempt to undermine scientific evidence. General principles of good project planning apply, such as ensuring that policy makers and women leaders are involved from the beginning in identifying priorities and in planning. Knowing how to identify the most effective messengers to reach policy makers depends upon savvy political know-how and close cooperation among researchers, the media, and tobacco control activists.

Some suggestions for action are:

- *Mobile technical assistance teams.* A quick-response strategy could involve mobile technical teams in responding to national emergency situations, such as an impending national law to ban advertising. Led by partners in developing countries, teams would draw upon the expertise of NGOs and governments in the international tobacco control movement. Criteria for selection of team members would include gender balance, interdisciplinary mix, and cultural sensitivity. These technical assistance teams could help national tobacco control leaders train investigators in research and evaluation techniques, assist in the transfer of treatment technologies, help build a stronger NGO infrastructure, and develop capacity training in advocacy, communications, and legal counseling.
- *Using the Internet and new information technologies to reach audiences worldwide.* The Internet is one of the most cost-effective media for rapidly disseminating information and can respond to political action and campaigns internationally. An important initiative has been undertaken by the WHO and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to initiate the National Tobacco Information Online System (NATIONS). Operated in partnership with the American Cancer Society, World Bank, UN Children's Fund, and International Union Against Cancer, NATIONS is an electronic system for tracking country-specific information and a potential source of updated data on women and tobacco (17). In the future, it will be essential to ensure that such Web sites are multilingual if they are to be accessible worldwide. Using new information technologies, local groups can also receive better training in how to use research results for global action. Recent experiences of the Framework Convention Alliance demonstrate that documents can be translated into different languages—such as French,

Spanish, Chinese, and Arabic—at little cost; this can have long-lasting benefits.

- *Cooperation with the Framework Convention Conference of Parties to help disseminate research results.* The Framework Convention Conference of Parties, which will oversee the implementation and monitoring of the tobacco treaty, should be encouraged to provide training and technical assistance to countries for dissemination of gender and tobacco research. The Conference of Parties can also be an important catalyst to translate research results into policies. NGOs that are actively involved in monitoring progress would also be important allies in the exchange and dissemination of information.

### *Disparities*

The Framework Convention process, the Internet, and mobile teams would help balance the flow of knowledge between economically developed and developing countries and promote rapid diffusion of innovations. Sharing strategies to combat tobacco industry tactics could jump-start a movement that could act as a catalyst for change.

### *Partners*

Two important partners in teamwork between economically developed and developing countries would be the NGO members of the Framework Convention Alliance and governments represented in the Framework Convention Conference of Parties process. As these groups have developed expertise in a wide range of gender and tobacco issues, as well as international law and national tobacco control, they can be drawn upon to work closely with local leaders. Funders and supporters might include public and private foundations, government agencies that provide international aid, and NGOs, such as those working in women's health and consumer protection. Technical expertise can be mobilized through gender research centers and international and regional women's research networks, such as FEMNET in sub-Saharan Africa. Litigation consortiums may also be established to support national efforts and bring expertise related to international law and treaties such as the Framework Convention.

### *Impact*

The impact of a multipronged strategy that includes rapid-response teamwork could be significant. For example, such teamwork could help promote speedy exchange of know-how and arm NGOs with examples of industry tactics. A train-the-trainers approach could also be supported for rapid

diffusion of skills and information. Other positive outcomes would be to increase accountability through media attention, link local to international networks, decrease tobacco use through better cessation treatments, and promote strong national and local legislation. If litigation teams are successful, national tobacco control programs might also raise revenues for tobacco control.

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