# WHO reports successes and challenges in global fight against tobacco epidemic 

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Every year tobacco-related diseases claim approximately 6 million lives worldwide. In response to this growing epidemic, a current total of 180 countries have signed and committed to implementing the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO FCTC), which started taking force in 2005. To guide and facilitate implementation, the WHO established guidelines - called the MPOWER measures that emphasize cost-effectiveness, practicality and impact:

- Monitor tobacco use and prevention policies
- Protect people from tobacco smoke
- Offer help to quit tobacco use
- Warn about the dangers of tobacco
- Enforce bans on tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship
- Raise taxes on tobacco

Since then, significant strides have been made in reducing the global burden of tobacco use and nicotine addiction - but the fight is far from over.

## Achievements and shortcomings in global tobacco control

The WHO Report on the Global Tobacco Epidemic, 2015 reports that more and more

countries have achieved best practice level in implementing the MPOWER measures, including:

- A comprehensive smoke-free law covering all indoor public places and workplaces
- Smoking cessation services
- Large graphic pack warnings
- A complete ban on all tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship (TAPS) activities

However, most countries have yet to make sufficient progress on one important measure: the "R" component of MPOWER.

Raising tobacco taxes to more than 75 percent of the retail price is generally acknowledged to be the single most effective and costeffective strategy for reducing tobacco use. It effectively curbs demand for tobacco products
especially among the most vulnerable populations: the young and the poor. It costs relatively little to implement and has the helpful "side effect" of boosting government revenues. And yet, as of 2014, only 10 percent of the world's population live in countries with sufficiently high tobacco taxes, making it the least widely implemented MPOWER measure.

## The Philippines: inroads

In 2012, annual tobacco excise revenues in the Philippines were only PHP32.9 billion - while annual economic losses related to tobacco use were over 5 times that amount at PHP177 billion. Two concurrent situations created a unique opportunity for the Philippines to push significant reforms: the timely periodic revision of the country's tobacco and alcohol "sin tax" laws, and the need for new government revenues to support its universal health insurance program. The Philippines:

- promoted the tax reformsprimarily as a public health measure;
- allocated the bulk of anticipated tax revenues to subsidizing health insurance for 14.7 million underprivi-leged individuals;
- earmarked $15 \%$ of revenues to promote alternative liveli-hoods for farmers and workers in tobacco-growing provinces; and
- mobilized multiple sectors of society, including a "white army" of health care pro-
fessionals, to drum up political and popular support for the tax increase.

Thus, in 2012, landmark "sin tax" reforms were passed into law and immediately implemented the following year. As a result, tobacco excise collections more than doubled in 2013 to PHP70.4 billion. Excise rates increased by as much as $341 \%$ and provisions are in place for further regular increases a tobacco taxation success story lauded by the WHO.

## Conclusion

In summary, the 2015 WHO report states: "Progress spurred by the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control and the consistent MPOWER measures over the past decade has helped protect $40 \%$ of the world's people through at least one MPOWER measure at the highest level of achievement. As countries continue the process of adopting and implementing effective tobacco control strategies, they can look for inspiration and guidance to other countries that have successfully moved to advance their policies to the best practice level."

WHO further notes that tobacco-related diseases cause more deaths per year than HIVAIDS, malaria and tuberculosis combined. "Implementing the evidence-based, legally binding provisions of WHO's FCTC to their fullest extent represents the world's best chance of reducing this toll."

