Investment fund for tobacco control - what you need to know

Despite an abridged agenda and a virtual format, there are still critical discussions that need to take place at the Ninth Session of the Conference of the Parties in November of this year. Importantly, Parties will be invited to discuss and make a decision on whether or not to establish an FCTC investment fund. The Secretariat will present a proposal for this fund, which is suggested as a means to increase revenues available to support the important work that the Convention Secretariat carries out to support Parties between COP sessions. Here’s what you need to know about this important discussion.

How we got here: The Conference of the Parties (COP) is the governing body of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) and is comprised of all Parties to the Convention. Currently there are 182 Parties covering more than 90% of the world’s population. Sessions of the COP occur every two years when Parties review the implementation of the Convention and take decisions necessary to promote its effective implementation. At each COP session, a workplan and budget are developed for the two following years.

The workplan includes support for Parties to fulfill their obligations through the provision of technical assistance in implementing provisions of the Convention, with particular focus on developing-country Parties and Parties with economies in transition.

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Investment fund.... continued from page 1

This can be through direct assistance to Parties, assistance to Parties by sharing lessons and evidence through South-South and Triangular cooperation, assistance to Parties through training, knowledge sharing and sharing of good practices and networking, assistance to Parties through the development of toolkits, manuals and publications, and action in support of SDG 3, Target 3.a.

To fund these and other activities of the Convention Secretariat (CS) including staff costs, Parties pay assessed contributions (ACs) every two years. Assessed Contributions do not cover all of the costs of this work, however, and the CS also seeks what are called extra-budgetary funds. These funds often come in the form of voluntary donations from high-income countries.

With a growing number of Parties to the COP and no increase in ACs, the COP, at its Seventh session in 2016, emphasized the need for the CS to raise more funds and to consider various ways of doing this, including the possibility for an international fund for tobacco control. One option posed was the establishment of a fixed source of capital income as an investment vehicle that could provide an annual source of supplemental income from earned interest.

At the Eighth session of the COP in 2018, a decision was made for the Secretariat to look further into the concept and to make recommendations for the establishment and operation of such an investment fund, and report to the Ninth session of the COP (COP9). COP9 will take place virtually in November 2021 when discussion on the investment fund will take place.

Some key points regarding the structure of the proposed fund are:

- Parties and other investors volunteer to contribute to the fund. They would provide interest-free loans for a pre-determined fixed term
- Funds from volunteering investors would be placed in an investment portfolio managed by the World Bank
- The earned interest on the invested capital funds would be drawn on to fund the FCTC. The capital investment in the fund is not accessible
- At the end of the investment term, the original capital investment would be returned to investors

How will these funds be used? At the end of the 2-year investment cycle, interest earned on the capital placed in the fund will be withdrawn at a prescribed rate, and provided to the WHO FCTC. The funds would be used to support the activities in the workplan and budget of the WHO FCTC. That means that the COP would have oversight of the use of these funds, since the COP reviews and approves both the activities in the workplan and the allocation of funds for these activities at each COP session.

The purpose of this fund is to generate stable and predictable revenue that is needed to bridge the gap between the workplan and budget of the WHO FCTC and funds received through existing core ACs and extra-budgetary funds.

Discussions on funding the COP’s budget and workplan are important, but we can’t forget that they’re also just one piece of the puzzle. It will be equally important that the COP discusses the need to do other kinds of fundraising, such as to raise funds for FCTC implementation at the national level in low and middle-income countries. We need to make sure this will be addressed at COP10 in 2023.
Congratulations to the Samoa Cancer Society 2021 WHO WNTD Awardee

Every year, WHO recognizes individuals or organizations in each of the six WHO Regions for their accomplishments in the area of tobacco control. This recognition takes the form of among others, World No Tobacco Day Awards.

Congratulations to the Samoa Cancer Society (SCS) for being a recipient this year. A few of their achievements are highlighted below.

The Samoa Cancer Society (SCS) has been a key partner in raising awareness about the dangers of tobacco cultivation, manufacturing, and use in Samoa; as well as about tobacco industry interference. SCS is one of only two civil society representatives on the National Tobacco Control Committee, which is a multisectoral committee established by law to advise on and coordinate support for tobacco control efforts in Samoa.

The SCS was a crucial advocate for strengthening tobacco control laws which led to the amendment of the Samoa Tobacco Control Act in 2019.

In 2020, the SCS engaged over 30 youth to promote the theme “Protecting youth from industry manipulation and preventing them from tobacco and nicotine use”. The SCS also launched the #buttitout campaign. The goal of this campaign is to raise awareness and disseminate information about the negative impact cigarette butt litter has on our health and the environment. The SCS completed outreach visits to 9 communities that included secondary schools, workplaces, church gatherings and women’s committees in rural villages where they highlighted that the consumption of tobacco has been identified as among the leading causes of cancer in Samoa.

The Samoa Cancer Society was part of the development of the Samoa National Communications Strategy for Tobacco Control developed in 2020 and is a member of the National Tobacco Cessation Committee raising awareness about existing cessation services in Samoa.
World No Tobacco Day 2021 in Pacific island countries
World No Tobacco Day 2021 in Pacific island countries
Snapshots of progress made in tobacco control in Pacific island countries despite continued need to focus on COVID-19

In Fiji, before the second wave of COVID-19, the Fiji Cancer Society had integrated tobacco cessation messaging in cancer outreach screening.

In Kiribati, a survey was recently administered about the impact of price and tax on tobacco used among adults in Tarawa - results pending.

In the Federated States of Micronesia, the FSM Global Youth Tobacco Survey (GYTS) fact sheet was recently released (see here).

In Palau, the Coalition for a Tobacco Free Palau completed a Quit and Win Challenge and will conduct a 3 month follow up shortly with participants who had successfully quit. The Coalition also recently completed Palau’s report for the Global Tobacco Industry Interference Index and is developing a dissemination plan.

In Samoa, the Samoa Cancer Society CEO Su’a John Ryan was a speaker at a recently held virtual dialogue “building capacity for policy change”, organized by the UICC as part of their Tobacco Control and Cancer series. See dialogue here.

In Tonga, the Ministry of Health continues to promote tobacco cessation through their quit line.

In the Solomon Islands, the Global Youth Leadership Network (GYLN) is completing the Solomon Islands report for the Global Tobacco Industry Interference Index and drafting a TI Index dissemination plan.

In Vanuatu, the Ministry of Health partnered with Wan Smol Bag, a local theater company, to develop a brief tobacco cessation training video series.

Pacific region loses a champion for public health

The regional tobacco control community was saddened to learn of the recent passing of Mrs. Shra L. Alik from the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM). Mrs. Alik served as the FSM’s tobacco control focal point for several years and was a delegate at INB4 in 2010, COP4 in 2011 and COP5 in 2012. Through her commitment and dedication to public health, Mrs. Alik undoubtedly helped to save many lives.
Key report on the fight to end the global tobacco epidemic launched by the World Health Organization

Many countries are making progress in the fight against tobacco, but the recently launched WHO Report on the Global Tobacco Epidemic, 2021 shows some are stalled. Of the 27 Parties in the Western Pacific Region, 13 (including seven Pacific island countries) made advances in implementing MPower measures. Demand reduction measures from the WHO FCTC that are proven to be most effective to reduce tobacco use are known collectively as “MPower”.

Progress to date for Pacific island countries

M - Monitor tobacco use and prevention policies
- The Cook Islands and Palau have recent, representative and periodic data for both youth and adults.

P - Protect people from tobacco smoke
- The Marshall Islands, Nauru, Niue, and Papua New Guinea are protected by comprehensive smoke-free laws.

O - Offer help to quit tobacco use
- The Cook Islands and Tonga newly reached the highest level of implementation for tobacco dependence treatments in the region.
- Special recognition was given to the Kingdom of Tonga for being the first Pacific island country to offer comprehensive tobacco cessation support.

W - Warn about the dangers of tobacco (anti tobacco mass media campaigns)
- Fiji (60%), Solomon Islands (50%), and Vanuatu (90%) have had no change in their highest-level of achievement (at least 50% of principal surface areas) group since 2016.
- Palau, Tonga, and Tuvalu implemented best-practice level of mass media campaigns between 2018 and 2020.

E - Enforce bans on tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship
- There is also no change in the implementation of TAPS measures among Pacific island countries; however, Kiribati, Niue, Tuvalu, Vanuatu implement comprehensive TAPS ban.

R - Raise taxes on tobacco
- Tobacco products are becoming less affordable in Fiji, Micronesia, Nauru, Palau, Samoa, Tonga and Tuvalu; however, none have reached the excise tax being at least 75% of retail price benchmark.

The WHO news release can be seen here.
Resources

The WHO FCTC is one of three international conventions referred to in the SDGs.

Two resources made available recently from the Convention Secretariat are 1) the recording of a webinar held in late June on "Showcasing SDG Target 3. a in Parties’ Voluntary National Reviews" (see here and 2) release of the Guide for WHO FCTC Parties on including SDG Target 3.a in Voluntary National Reviews". The guide aims to help Parties to the WHO FCTC to include reference to, and reporting on, the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) Target 3.a (Strengthen implementation of the WHO FCTC in all countries as appropriate) in their Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) of progress towards the SDGs. The recommendations are for the Parties in general and, within the Parties, for a broad audience that includes WHO FCTC focal points, other tobacco control stakeholders and entities responsible for VNR preparation. For the Guide, see here.

Most people are aware of the devastating health harms of tobacco and how it claims millions of lives every year. But now STOP, a tobacco industry watchdog, is also calling attention to the environmental destruction caused by tobacco growing, production, consumption and disposal. STOP has launched a campaign to call out the tobacco industry for the harms it has caused to the environment. Download a new resource the "Tobacco Industry and the Environment" to learn more about the devastating impact of tobacco on our environment.

Winners of Global Media Competition announced

The Global Center for Good Governance in Tobacco Control (GGTC), announced winners of the global media competition. The competition theme this year was "Lies & Cover-Ups: Time to Make Tobacco Pay"

Submissions portray how the tobacco industry conceals, covers up, and misrepresents the enormous burdens it has placed on people, health systems, the environment and the global economy.

See brief video announcing the winners here.
NINTH SESSION OF THE CONFERENCE OF THE PARTIES (COP9) TO THE WHO FCTC & THE SECOND SESSION OF THE MEETING OF THE PARTIES (MOP2) TO THE PROTOCOL TO ELIMINATE ILLICIT TRADE IN TOBACCO PRODUCTS

In light of the COVID-19 global pandemic and its impact on the conduct of global conferences and travel, it is not feasible to organize an in-person meeting at The Hague, Netherlands, as initially planned. In this regard, the next session of the Conference of the Parties (COP9) to the WHO FCTC and of the Meeting of the Parties (MOP2) to the Protocol to Eliminate Illicit Trade in Tobacco Products will be held virtually.

COP9 will take place from 8 to 13 November 2021

Sessions will take place every day from 10:00 - 17:00 CET with a one-hour break between 13:00 and 14:00 CET

The charts below indicate the timing of these sessions for Pacific island countries. Confirm time and dates in your location here.

1ST SESSION: 10:00 - 13:00 CET (GENEVA TIME)

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2ND SESSION: 14:00 - 17:00 CET (GENEVA TIME)

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MOP2 will take place from 15 to 18 November 2021, 10:00 - 13:00 and 14:00 - 17:00 CET (same times as the COP)
FCA PACIFIC ISLAND COUNTRIES

Working together to free the world from the devastating health, social, economic and environmental consequences of tobacco and tobacco use.

The Framework Convention Alliance (FCA) represents the voice of civil society in support of the world’s first global public health treaty – the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC). The FCA is made up of nearly 250 organizations from more than 100 low, middle and high income countries.

FCA has representatives in all WHO regions. The Western Pacific - Pacific Island Countries Regional Office (WPRO-Oceania) of FCA is located in Palau.

The Office’s main activities are:
- Mobilize and support civil society capacity in support of the FCTC
- Collaborate with other technical assistance providers serving the Pacific Islands
- Provide technical assistance to members & Parties

For further information, please contact the Regional Coordinator: lymana@fctc.org

SAVE THE DATE

3-4 September, 2021: (virtual) APACT. Deadline for registration August 15. For program information, see http://www.apact2021.com/program_a.php

6-12 September, 2021 - NCD Alliance (NCDA) Global Week for Action on NCDs. Theme: Engaging communities: People. Participation. Progress. See here for ideas, resources, toolkits, etc.


18 October, 2021: (virtual) Leadership Summit on Tobacco Control. Hosted by the 18th World Conference on Tobacco or Health.


8-13 November, 2021: Ninth session of the Conference of the Parties (COP9), to be held virtually.

15-18 November, 2021: Second session of the Meeting of the Parties (MOP2), to be held virtually.

FCA MEMBERS IN PACIFIC ISLAND COUNTRIES

- Coalition for a Tobacco Free Palau (CTFP)
- Fiji Cancer Society
- Global Youth Leadership Nexus (GYLN) (Solomon Islands)
- Kumit Bobrae Coalition Inc. (Marshall Islands)
- Marshall Islands Epidemiology and Prevention Initiatives, Inc. (MIEPI)
- Kia-Henry Nema (Papua New Guinea)
- Nauru National Women’s Council
- Samoa Cancer Society (SCS)
- Tuvalu Association of NGOs (TANGO)
- Ulkerreuil a Klengear- UAK (Palau)

FCA is grateful for funding received from the Australian Government to support tobacco control in the Pacific.