

This bulletin highlights the key activities, focusing on Tobacco Control and TB, carried out in Bangladesh, Cambodia, Indonesia, Nepal, Philippines, Timor-Leste and Vietnam during March 2023.

MONTHLY BULLETIN

March 2023

Vol. 007

HIGHLIGHTS



High-level meeting with H.E. Pushpa Kamal Dahal, the Right Honourable Prime Minister of Nepal

Nepal 's Prime Minister commits to end TB and tobacco

On March 16th, a meeting was held between the Right Honourable Prime Minister of Nepal, Mr. Pushpa Kamal Dahal and Dr. Tara Singh Bam, the Director of The Union Asia Pacific, Mr. Ananda Bahadur Chand, the Chairperson of Action Nepal. The meeting focused on discussing key strategies to prevent non-communicable diseases (NCDs) and Tuberculosis (TB). During the meeting, the Prime Minister made commitments to ensure the effective implementation of a tobacco control program and to include a provision of plain packaging on tobacco products in the amendment proposal of the tobacco control law. In addition, efforts to eliminate TB will include active case finding, ensuring a full course of TB treatment with the partnership of the community and improving accessible diagnosis services for all.

INDONESIA

Subnational Policy Implementation

Depok City is intensifying its endeavors to attain a minimum of 80% adherence to local tobacco regulations. A group of 30 officials from diverse departments collaborated to conduct random inspections of 1142 public locations, workplaces, and public transportation. The inspections ensured that no smoking signs were properly installed, no indication of smoking occurred, and no tobacco promotion was present. Depok City's dedication was demonstrated by the City Secretary, who presided over a ceremony to sign a document affirming the priority agenda of implementing smoke-free policies and a ban on tobacco advertising, promotion, and sponsorship (TAPS).



Depok City Secretary signed the commitment to accelerate efforts on smoke-free and TAPS ban

1142 venues randomly inspected in Depok City

Depok City steps up enforcement efforts.



Snapshot from No-Smoking Signage Campaign

THE BIG PUSH: Ensuring all 514 cities and districts in Indonesia adopt comprehensive tobacco control policies

Subnational Policy Expansion

In collaboration with the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Home Affairs, and local civil society, The Union has been conducting a roadshow to advocate for subnational policy expansion. Since February, the team has visited 15 cities and districts to push for the adoption of smoke-free policies and bans on tobacco advertising, promotion, and sponsorship (TAPS). In March, the team visited eight additional jurisdictions, furthering their efforts to encourage policy implementation at the subnational level. This coordinated approach demonstrates a commitment to reducing tobacco use and promoting public health throughout Indonesia.

Currently, there are 41 cities and districts in Indonesia that have yet to adopt smoke-free policies. A key strategy in 2023 involves engaging with Mayors and subnational leaders to facilitate a dialogue between national and subnational policy makers to foster a commitment to prioritizing tobacco control.



MOH, MOHA officials in Magelang City for smoke-free road show in Central Java



Head of Health offices for West Kalimantan Province meet to reaffirm commitments to adopting smoke-free policies

Despite the significant attention given by the government to address the issue, the rates of child stunting in Indonesia remain alarmingly high. According to the 2018 Indonesian Basic Health Survey, the prevalence of stunting is at 30.8 percent. Surprisingly, smoking has been rarely acknowledged as a risk factor for stunting. Studies have shown that there is an indirect correlation between parental smoking and an increased risk of stunting among children in impoverished urban families in Indonesia.

Indonesia cannot end stunting if tobacco use is not reduced

During a high-level meeting, the Minister of Village Development and the Head of the National Family Planning Agency discussed the link between tobacco use and stunting. The meeting served as a platform to raise awareness regarding the detrimental effects of tobacco use on children's growth and development. This important discussion highlights the government's commitment to addressing the issue of stunting in Indonesia and recognizing the role that tobacco use plays in hindering efforts to improve public health.

The Ministry of Village Development has committed to developing Technical Guidelines for Implementing Tobacco Control in the Village as a key strategy to address stunting. This demonstrates the government's recognition of the crucial role that tobacco control measures play in reducing the prevalence of stunting in Indonesia. The Head of the National Family Planning Board, who has been assigned as a lead stakeholder in reducing stunting in the country, also acknowledged smoking as a risk factor. They emphasized the need for greater multisectoral collaboration across all levels of government to implement robust tobacco control measures to combat stunting effectively.

The event, organized by The Union grantee ADINKES, was attended by 374 government officials, civil society and media.



Snapshot from National meeting on Stunting

BANGLADESH



Official letter from NCDC canceling the workshop (Left) and News of the cancellation of the workshop publishing in the national media (Right)

Tobacco Industry-sponsored workshop cancelled

The Union, in partnership with Bloomberg Partners in Bangladesh, was quick to alert the Ministry of Health to a concerning issue regarding a workshop planned in collaboration with the Bangladesh Blind Mission (BBM). It was discovered that the BBM was backed by the tobacco industry, as a grantee of the Foundation for a Smoke-Free World. The co-hosts of the workshop, the Non-Communicable Disease Control Program (NCDC) of the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS), admitted that they were unaware of BBM's affiliation with the tobacco industry. Upon learning this information, a letter was immediately issued to all participants to cancel the program. This highlights the importance of being vigilant and diligent in identifying the involvement of the tobacco industry in public health initiatives and ensuring that tobacco industry interference is prevented.

Mayors playing the key to effective implementation of Tobacco Control Policies at the Subnational Level

The Union and its grantee AID foundation are providing technical support and strategic guidance to Mayor's Alliance for Healthy City (MAHC). In 2023, the team aims to sensitize 100 mayors on the "Guidelines for Implementing Tobacco Control Programs in Local Government Institutions (LGITC Guidelines)". Chairman of the Alliance, Mayor of Cox's Bazar is championing the movement to bring tobacco control and a priority to his fellow mayors.



Meeting with Honorable Mayor of Cox's Bazar Municipality

VIETNAM



Capacity building workshop for National Assembly members

Higher tobacco taxes needed: Raising awareness of National Assembly Members

The Union and the Social Committee of the National Assembly came together to organize a workshop aimed at increasing awareness among National Assembly members from the Southern Province regarding the implementation of tobacco control laws. The workshop was chaired by the two Vice Chairpersons of the Social Committee and was attended by 60 elected members from the Southern Provinces. During the workshop, The Union emphasized the importance of raising taxes to safeguard public health. This discussion underscores the vital role of government officials in promoting and implementing effective tobacco control measures to protect the health of the public.



Courtesy meeting with Mayor of Atok

Atok Municipality Mayor to Strictly implement smokefree ordinance

A high-level meeting was convened by The Union's grantee, Transcend, with key stakeholders including the Mayor, Vice Mayor, the Rural Health Unit, and the Philippine National Police (PNP) Atok Chief, with the aim of establishing commitments for the immediate implementation of tobacco control policies. During the meeting, the Smoke-Free Ordinance, which regulates the use, sale, distribution, and advertisement of cigarettes, e-cigarettes, and betel quid or "momma", was discussed. Notably, both the Mayor and PNP Chief expressed their full support for the strict enforcement of the Ordinance, indicating a positive step forward in promoting tobacco control measures in the region.

Studies show that tourists prefer to travel to places where the environment is healthy and making a tourist attraction 100% smoke-free is a sure way to make it healthy for everyone.

The La Trinidad Strawberry Farm is the most visited tourist destination in the province with over 600,000 visitors per strawberry harvest season.

The municipal government launched its health tourism campaign commencing at the Strawberry Farm on March 14, 2023. Smoking, vaping, and chewing of betel quid/momma are strictly prohibited in the premises of the La Trinidad Strawberry Farm.

The Union grantee Transcend provides technical assistance to the province of Benguet.

La Trinidad Strawberry Farm Declared Tobacco Free



Snapshot from Launching ceremony of Health Tourism Campaign

250 youth trained on tobacco-free

The Union grantee Transcend, in coordination with Smokefree Benguet, conducted awareness-raising sessions on the dangers of smoking, vaping and betel quid chewing at two High schools in Barangay. More than 250 youths attended the awareness-raising orientations.



Smoke-free Orientation at Kibungan National High School



Smoke-free Orientation at Evelio Javier Memorial National High School

Strengthening Smokefree implementation in Gandaki Province

A high-level meeting was organized by The Union grantee, Action Nepal, and the Health Journalist Forum Nepal, which was attended by Honourable Khagraj Adhakari, Chief Minister of Gandaki Province. During the meeting, Chief Minister Adhakari expressed agreement to develop a roadmap for tobacco control, with the aim of strengthening smoke-free and TAPS bans in Gandaki Province. Action Nepal has been providing technical assistance for the development of this roadmap, while the Health Journalist Forum Nepal has documented local government commitments through publishing media articles. This collaboration demonstrates the importance of bringing together key stakeholders to develop and implement effective tobacco control policies in Nepal.



High-level meeting with Honourable Khagraj Adhakari, Chief Minister of Gandaki Province



Snapshot from meeting with Secretary of Ministry of Industry, Commerce and Supplies

Building Support from Ministry of Industry, Commerce and Supplies to strengthen tobacco control in Nepal

Action Nepal, a grantee of The Union, met with the Secretary of the Ministry of Industry, Commerce and Supplies to discuss strengthening the tobacco control law and keeping it a priority agenda to protect people from the dangers of tobacco.

No more roadblocks on implementation of 90% Pictorial Health Warnings on tobacco products

Following the supreme court's ruling mandating the implementation of 90% Pictorial Health Warnings (PHW), The Union and grantee Action Nepal are providing technical support to ensure strict enforcement. Although some imported tobacco products violate the policy, the tobacco industry can no longer reject it.



Cigarette packs with 90% PHW in Nepal



Snapshot from press meet organized by Action Nepal

Heavy economic burden due to low tobacco tax

The Union's grantee Action Nepal reveals the high cost of tobacco-related cancer treatment in Nepal, with patients spending up to Rs 981,370 (~7,500 USD). Despite earning Rs 14.1 billion revenue annually from tobacco products, there has been an expenditure of Rs 35.79 billion for cancer treatment. Action Nepal recommends increasing tobacco tax rates to reduce consumption, particularly among youth and the poor. The findings were presented to 30 journalists at a press conference.

CAMBODIA

100 tobacco control inspectors trained in Phnom Penh



Capacity Building Workshop for Tobacco Control Inspectors

Since 2013, The Union has sustained a close collaboration with the National Center for Health Promotion, Ministry of Health Cambodia to strengthen tobacco control policies at the national and subnational level.

National Centre for Health Promotion, Ministry of Health conducted two capacity building trainings for 100 tobacco control inspectors in Phnom Penh. The workshop strengthened inspectors' knowledge on legal procedures to collect evidence and built strong cooperation between tobacco inspectors and prosecutors. The inspectors can now take actions against those who smoke at workplaces or public places, those who doesn't display health warning messages and tobacco companies who do not display health warning labels on tobacco packages.

TIMOR-LESTE

200 youths urge officials to reject tobacco industry donations

The Union's grantee ANCT-TL and partners conducted an anti-tobacco industry campaign on World Oral Health Day in Timor-Leste. 200 youths urged political parties to reject tobacco industry donations during the upcoming parliamentary elections.



Youth's plea to the government to reject any donations from TI



Mayor of Dili unveils a no-smoking signage at Mayor office compound

Dili launches the 5-year Action Plan to make the city smoke-free

The Mayor of Dili Municipality launched a 5-year plan to make the city smoke-free, assigning roles to government stakeholders and installing no smoking signs in schools and offices. The Union's grantee ANCT-TL provides support and aims to expand the initiative to other cities.

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