

Making Strides Together against Tobacco Use

Takeshi Kasai*

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In the Western Pacific Region, more than 3 million people die as a result of tobacco use every year. That's over 8000 people every day. Not only does tobacco use kill people prematurely, it exacerbates poverty, reduces economic productivity, and damages the environment. Tobacco is therefore not only a problem for health – it also threatens social and economic development. This must stop.

When countries came together to adopt the World Health Organization (WHO) Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) - the world's first international public health treaty - 17 years ago, they made a commitment to ending death and disease caused by the world's number one preventable killer. Following the adoption of this landmark treaty, WHO developed the MPOWER package – six evidence-based demand-reduction measures to support countries in implementing the WHO FCTC. Taking advantage of these powerful tools, countries have made important progress in the last decade, with two out of three countries and areas in the Region achieving measurable declines in smoking rates.

Data, in all its forms, is a powerful tool for tobacco control. In many countries, strong national surveillance mechanisms have been established to monitor both tobacco use and tobacco control measures at the population level, through standardized methods. Comparable data made available through these efforts helps to assess tobacco control issues and evaluate measures implemented over time and across countries. In turn, this facilitates the sharing of achievements and lessons learned in tobacco control at the country, regional and international level.

This special supplement highlights the power of data and the important role it plays in helping countries to better understand issues and progress in tobacco control. In this supplement, six papers are presented to showcase efforts by a number of Western Pacific countries and areas to combat tobacco use and further advance progress in the battle against it.

As the six articles show, countries and areas across the Western Pacific Region have made substantial progress on tobacco control. Slowly, we are turning the tide against this preventable killer and the industry which promotes it. We should savour these successes, and do everything we can to sustain the momentum. And crucially, the

critical role tobacco control plays in promoting social and economic development is now acknowledged more widely; the WHO FCTC is included in the Sustainable Development Goals which were unanimously adopted by all UN Member States in 2015.

However, we must not be complacent: there is still much to be done.

It is my hope that countries from around the Region will gain valuable insight from this supplement and be inspired to continue fighting against the world's deadliest epidemic. Together, we can and will beat tobacco.