

World No Tobacco Day (WNTD) Themes

A Review of WNTD themes and relationship to international policy measures, including influence and inputs by non-government and philanthropic entities.

BRIEF HISTORY

World No Tobacco Day is celebrated every year on May 31st

One of eight global public health days marked by the World Health Organization (WHO), World No Tobacco Day (WNTD), was conceived to draw attention to the burden of preventable death and disease related to tobacco and nicotine use.^{1,2}

In 1987, the World Health Assembly called for April 7th of the following year—chosen to coincide with the WHO’s 40th anniversary—to be “a world no-smoking day.”² This first-of-its-kind global tobacco control campaign aimed to provide assistance to tobacco users trying to quit by advocating for abstinence from tobacco use for 24 hours. Themed “Tobacco or Health: Choose Health,” the initiative was taken up by a number of countries who organized supporting activities to mark the day in their own territories, including public smoking bans in Ethiopia, suspension of tobacco sales in Cuba, poster contests in Spain, and public information campaigns in Lebanon and China. The press coverage and discourse generated by such activities suggested broad support for a range of tobacco control policy and health education measures.³

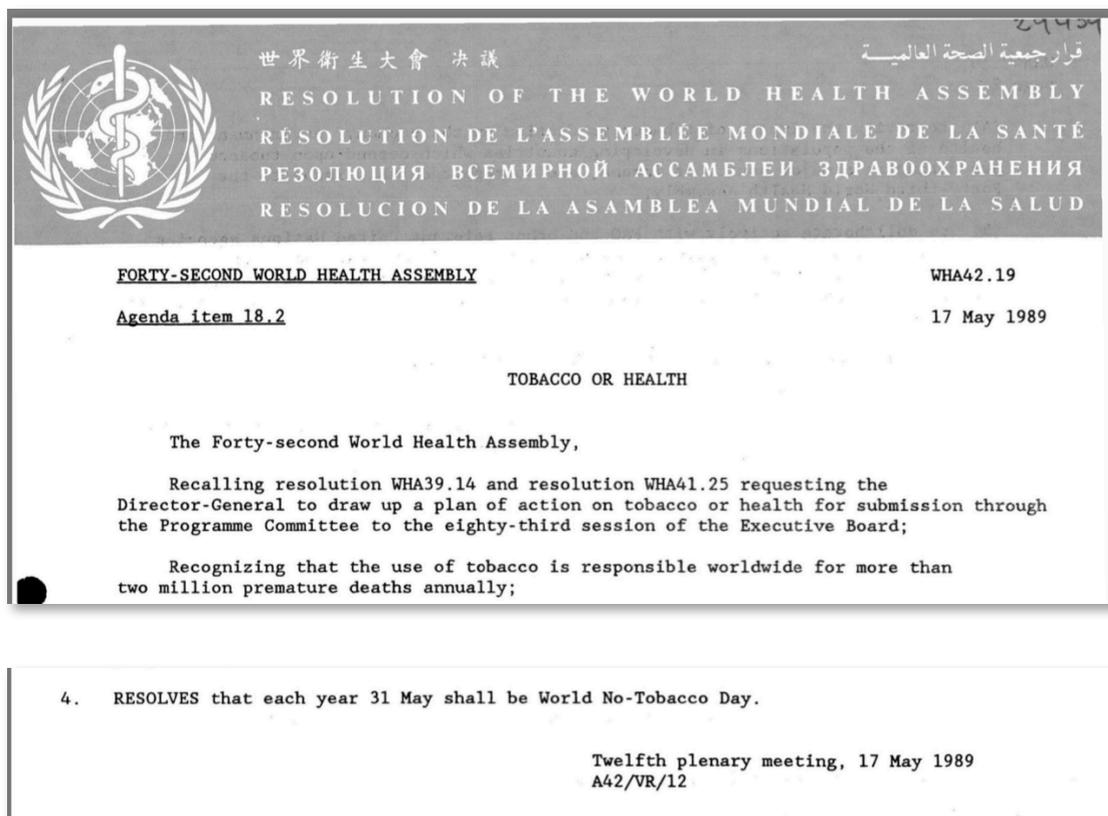
Two years later, in 1989, the 42nd Assembly passed resolution WHA42.19 during its 12th Plenary Meeting, affirming that “health services should clearly and unequivocally publicize the health risks connected with the use of tobacco and actively support all efforts to prevent the associated diseases.” This resolution went on to declare May 31st of each year going forward to be “World No Tobacco Day.”⁴

¹ World Health Organization, WHO Global Health Days. <http://tinyurl.com/ybgxtjf6>. Accessed May 29, 2020.

² World Health Organization, Tobacco Free Initiative (TFI), World No Tobacco Day. <http://tinyurl.com/y9ub3gsv>. Accessed May 29, 2020.

³ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report. <http://tinyurl.com/y98ytdbp>. Published 2016. Accessed May 29, 2020.

⁴ World Health Organization, Tobacco Free Initiative (TFI), WHA42.19 Tobacco or health. <http://tinyurl.com/yd2h2ewg>. Accessed May 29, 2020.



Excerpts from resolution WHA42.19.

The WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control

In 2003, the World Health Assembly unanimously adopted the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC), an evidence-based treaty committing countries which ratified the FCTC, also referred to as Parties, to a framework of strategies aimed at reducing both tobacco demand and supply.⁵ The Convention became the first international public health treaty negotiated under the auspices of the WHO and entered into force in 2005.⁵

With 182 Parties covering over 90% of the world's population, the FCTC is one of the most widely embraced treaties in United Nations (UN) history and is governed by a Conference of Parties (COP).^{6,7} The key task of the COP is to regularly review implementation of the FCTC and to take decisions necessary to promote its effective implementation.^{6,7} To date, the COP has held eight sessions: the first (COP1) was held in 2006, followed by COP2 in 2007 and COP3 in 2008, and then every 2 years since. COP8 was held in October 2018 in Geneva, Switzerland and was attended by over 1,200 participants,

⁵ World Health Organization Europe, WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control. <http://tinyurl.com/yd2sm4cf>. Accessed May 29, 2020.

⁶ World Health Organization Framework Convention on Tobacco Control. The Conference of the Parties to the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control. <https://tinyurl.com/ybgcb8rb>. Accessed May 29, 2020.

⁷ World Health Organization Framework Convention on Tobacco Control. Parties to the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control <https://tinyurl.com/y93uxwuo>. Accessed May 29, 2020

including delegations from 148 Parties, as well as representatives of UN agencies, intergovernmental organizations, and civil society groups.^{8,9}

To help countries implement the provisions and articles of FCTC the WHO also developed MPOWER, a prioritized package of six technical measures, each corresponding to at least one FCTC provision¹⁰. Launched in 2008, with financial support from The Bloomberg Initiative to Reduce Tobacco (BI), MPOWER was designed to be a simple, digestible “roadmap” for policymakers to reduce demand for tobacco products. Unfortunately, it completely neglected the effects on farmers and all “supply” side FCTC Articles. Because of their accessibility, the MPOWER measures would go on to form the basis for a number of WNTD campaign themes.¹¹ Similar packages were recommended by experts in South Africa as early as 1988,¹² with emphasis on support for smokers and cessation services through regulatory measures.¹³

THEMES

WNTD campaigns are linked to different tobacco-related themes each year. Early themes often centered around building public awareness about the dangers of tobacco and would later become part of the MPOWER “Warn” measure. Slogans such as “Tobacco Kills, Don't be Duped” (2000) and “Tobacco: Deadly in Any Form or Disguise” (2006) suggested that people may not be aware of the true harms of tobacco use and aimed to educate the general public on health risks associated with tobacco use, highlighting relevant research and statistics.¹⁴ Chitra Subramaniam an architect of ‘Don't be duped Campaign, working at WHO in 2000 with Dr Derek Yach, then Executive Director, Noncommunicable Diseases and Mental Health, WHO, details the background of industry tactics in her article in ‘newslaundry.com’¹⁵

In recent years, a number of campaigns have taken on a more advocacy-oriented tone in line with the MPOWER “Enforce” measure. “Break the Tobacco Marketing Net” (2008), “Show the Truth. Picture Warnings Save Lives” (2009), “Smoking is Ugly” (2010), “Are You Being Manipulated?” (2013), “Get

⁸ World Health Organization Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, Sessions of the Conference of the Parties to the WHO FCTC. <http://tinyurl.com/y7rtltfx>. Accessed May 29, 2020.

⁹ WHO FCTC COP8 Concludes with New Strategy to Accelerate Tobacco Control Efforts and Stronger Transparency Measures to Counter Tobacco Industry Interference [press release]. Geneva, Switzerland: World Health Organization Framework Convention on Tobacco Control; October 7, 2018. <http://tinyurl.com/yadmut4k>. Accessed May 29, 2020.

¹⁰ MPOWER: A Policy Package to Reverse the Tobacco Epidemic. https://www.who.int/tobacco/mpower/mpower_english.pdf Accessed May 29, 2020.

¹¹ World Health Organization, Tobacco Free Initiative (TFI), MPOWER Brochures and Other Resources. <http://tinyurl.com/y8zdfol>. Accessed May 29, 2020.

¹² Yach, D, Townshend GS. Smoking and health in South Africa. *S Afr Med J*. 1988;73(2):391-399.

¹³ Townshend, GS, Yach D. Anti-smoking legislation – an international perspective applied to South Africa. *S Afr Med J*. 1988;73(2):412-416.

¹⁴ WHO Tobacco Free Initiative - Previous World No Tobacco Days <https://www.who.int/tobacco/communications/events/wntd/en/> Accessed May 29, 2020.

¹⁵ Newslaundry.com – Don't be duped* by Chitra Subramaniam <https://www.newslaundry.com/2013/08/12/tobacco-kills-dont-be-duped> Accessed May 29, 2020.

Ready for Plain Packaging” (2016), and “The Secret’s Out” (2020) call out industry marketing practices and advocate for restrictions on industry ability to market and promote tobacco products.¹⁶

OBSERVANCE

Through the Tobacco Free Initiative (TFI), a department within the Noncommunicable Diseases and Mental Health cluster, the WHO has been supporting WNTD with events and activities since 1999.¹⁷

Each year, around WNTD, the TFI releases public education or advocacy resources around a unified “call to action,” to raise awareness of the dangerous effects of tobacco use and secondhand smoke exposure. Historically, WNTD activities have involved the design and distribution of campaign materials, including brochures, flyers, posters, and press releases. In 2008, the TFI debuted a mini-website and YouTube video content as part of its WNTD campaign aimed at youth, and podcasts were introduced in 2009.^{18,19}

The TFI also serves as a central hub for fostering communication and coordinating WNTD events around the world. Since 2000, the TFI encourages regional and country-level tobacco control groups to share news about their WNTD activities and publishes this information on its WNTD webpage.²⁰

Finally, TFI gives out the annual World No Tobacco Day Awards, recognizing individuals and organizations around the world for contributions to FCTC implementation at the country level.²¹ Nomination criteria are based on contributions specific to policy related to the chosen WNTD theme of that particular year, and a list of winners is published on the TFI website.²⁰ A review of past award recipients indicates roughly half (i.e., ~46%) of all awardees since 2004 have been government officials or ministries involved in local tobacco control policy making.

Over the years, WNTD has provided an accessible, low-bar entry platform for launch of local tobacco control programs, including but not limited to, mass media public education campaigns, public debates, rallies, advertising bans, and implementation of smoke-free environments. To maintain a global perspective, this paper will not delve into specific details of these activities except to note that

¹⁶ WHO Tobacco Free Initiative - Previous World No Tobacco Days <https://www.who.int/tobacco/communications/events/wntd/en/>. Accessed May 29, 2020.

¹⁷ World Health Organization, Tobacco Free Initiative (TFI), Who We Are. <http://tinyurl.com/yb8fa4uz>. Accessed May 29, 2020.

¹⁸ World Health Organization, Tobacco Free Initiative (TFI), World No Tobacco Day, 31 May 2008. <http://tinyurl.com/ydapr6d2>. Accessed May 29, 2020.

¹⁹ World Health Organization, Tobacco Free Initiative (TFI), World No Tobacco Day, 31 May 2009. <http://tinyurl.com/y9fh8qsp>. Accessed May 29, 2020.

²⁰ World Health Organization, Tobacco Free Initiative (TFI), World No Tobacco Day. <http://tinyurl.com/y9ub3gsv>. Accessed May 29, 2020.

²¹ World Health Organization, Tobacco Free Initiative (TFI), Previous winners of the World No Tobacco Day awards. <https://tinyurl.com/yqhhpg5>. Accessed May 29, 2020.

May 31st has served as a springboard and important milestone marker for tobacco control initiatives at the regional, country, city, and district levels.

GLOBAL SUPPORT

The TFI's primary purpose is to focus international attention, resources, and action on global tobacco control efforts. To this end, they work in close collaboration with other WHO departments to integrate tobacco control into other health programs and with WHO Member States, other international organizations, and civil society groups working on tobacco control.²²

Bloomberg Initiative to Reduce Tobacco Use

In August 2006, financier, philanthropist, and New York City Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg pledged US \$125 million over 2 years to support global tobacco control efforts in high-burden tobacco use, low-, and middle-income countries.²³ The following year, the Bloomberg Initiative to Reduce Tobacco Use (BI) was launched, bringing together a coalition of six grantee organizations to plan and provide technical capacity and strategy coordination to tobacco control stakeholders in 15 priority countries around the world, where two-thirds of all smokers live. The Bloomberg global partners are²⁴

- Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Foundation
- Vital Strategies (formerly World Lung Foundation)
- International Union Against Tuberculosis and Lung Disease Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health
- World Health Organization

In February 2008, Bloomberg stepped out to support the WHO launch of the MPOWER package of tobacco demand reduction measures. Hence, BI and partner efforts aligned in support of the six strategies.

BI also continues to support MPOWER through the Bloomberg Philanthropies Awards for Global Tobacco Control, held every 3 years since 2009 and timed to coincide with World Conference on

²² World Health Organization, Tobacco Free Initiative (TFI), Who We Work With. <http://tinyurl.com/yb8fa4uz>. Accessed May 29, 2020.

²³ WHO Named as One of Five Partners to Implement Michael Bloomberg's \$125 Million Initiative to Promote Freedom from Smoking [press release]. Geneva, Switzerland: World Health Organization; November 3, 2006. <http://tinyurl.com/y7dm9rlt>. Accessed May 29, 2020.

²⁴ Over 1 Billion Newly Protected By Effective Tobacco Control Policies [press release]. New York: Bloomberg Philanthropies; July 7, 2011. <http://tinyurl.com/y9rtlxph>. Accessed May 29, 2020.

Tobacco or Health (WCTOH). The awards recognize six middle- and low-income countries for their tobacco control achievements, with award categories based on the six MPOWER strategies.²⁵

Since the initial 2006 pledge, BI has repeatedly renewed its commitment with additional rounds of funding for global tobacco control including:

- July 2008: US \$250 million pledged over 4 years²⁶
- March 2012: US \$220 million pledged²⁷
- December 2016: additional US \$360 million pledged²⁸

To date, BI has pledged nearly US \$1 billion to global tobacco control, resulting in new tobacco control policy measures protecting nearly 1.7 billion people around the world.²⁹ Other specific initiatives receiving direct support from BI include:

- WHO Report Series on the Global Tobacco Epidemic: seven reports launched between 2008 and 2019, with special emphasis on global implementation of MPOWER measures³⁰
- The Tobacco Atlas: a graphic mapping resource of the global tobacco epidemic³¹
- Stopping Tobacco Organizations and Products (STOP): a global watchdog established in 2018 to provide tobacco industry monitoring and awareness³²

In 2016, Michael Bloomberg was named the WHO Global Ambassador for Noncommunicable Diseases.³³

²⁵ Bloomberg Philanthropies to Present Global Tobacco Control Awards at World Conference on Tobacco or Health in Abu Dhabi [press release], New York: Bloomberg Philanthropies; February 9, 2015. <http://tinyurl.com/y94nkw8x>. Accessed May 29, 2020.

²⁶ Michael Bloomberg and Bill Gates Join to Combat Global Tobacco Epidemic [press release], New York: Bloomberg Philanthropies; July 23, 2008. <http://tinyurl.com/yavh8p5x>. Accessed May 29, 2020.

²⁷ Bloomberg Philanthropies Commits \$220 Million To Fight Tobacco Use [press release], New York: Bloomberg Philanthropies; March 22, 2012. <http://tinyurl.com/y7ojfcmf>. Accessed May 29, 2020.

²⁸ Michael R. Bloomberg Commits \$360 Million to Reduce Tobacco [press release], New York: Bloomberg Philanthropies; December 5, 2016. <http://tinyurl.com/yaebumlk>. Accessed May 29, 2020.

²⁹ Bloomberg Philanthropies, Tobacco Control, If Left Unchecked, Tobacco Use Will Kill One Billion People This Century. <http://tinyurl.com/ycv68eqv>. Accessed May 29, 2020.

³⁰ WHO Launches New Report on The Global Tobacco Epidemic [press release], July 26, 2019 <http://tinyurl.com/y6bc96b2>. Accessed May 29, 2020.

³¹ American Cancer Society and Vital Strategies. The Tobacco Atlas. <https://tinyurl.com/y9blfwdr>. Accessed May 29, 2020.

³² Bloomberg Philanthropies, Stopping Tobacco Organizations and Products (STOP) <http://tinyurl.com/y8jum7zo>. Accessed May 29, 2020.

³³ Michael R. Bloomberg Becomes WHO Global Ambassador for Noncommunicable Diseases [press release], New York: Bloomberg Philanthropies; August 17, 2016. <http://tinyurl.com/yc27rk3p>. Accessed May 29, 2020.

The focus of BI funding has been on policy development for MPOWER areas with little attention to the “O – Offer Help to quit tobacco use” component of MPOWER. The grant applications are accepted for work “on a national policy gap in their country in the PWER areas of MPOWER, or FCTC Article 5.3 policy.”³⁴

The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation

In July 2008, Bill Gates appeared with Michael Bloomberg at a New York City media event to announce a combined commitment of US \$500 million in tobacco control grants funding over 5 years.³⁵ The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation pledged US \$125 million in funding support over 5 years.³⁵

The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation Tobacco Control Program focuses primarily on building the evidence base, social marketing, and policy interventions in China, Southeast Asia, and Africa. Gates works in close coordination with BI and, since 2008, has committed nearly US \$210 million in tobacco control funding across 30 countries in Africa and Asia.³⁶

In 2015, Bloomberg Philanthropies and The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation launched the Anti-Tobacco Trade Litigation Fund, with an initial investment of US \$4 million to support governments under threat of lawsuit by the tobacco industry (i.e., Australia and Uruguay).³⁷

³⁴ Tobacco Control Grants. Bloomberg Initiative to Reduce Tobacco Use Grants Program. <https://tobaccocontrolgrants.org/About-the-BI-Grants-Program>. Accessed May 29 2020.

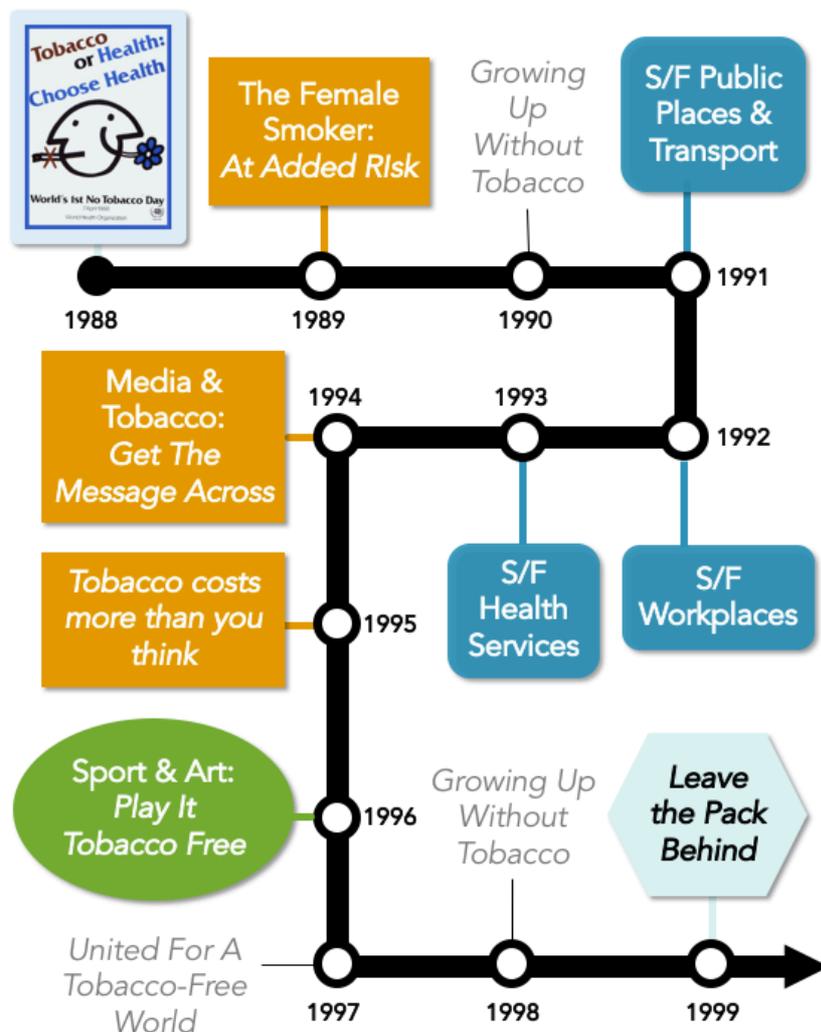
³⁵ Michael Bloomberg and Bill Gates Join to Combat Global Tobacco Epidemic [press release]. New York: Bloomberg Philanthropies; July 23, 2008. <http://tinyurl.com/yavh8p5x>. Accessed May 29, 2020.

³⁶ The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. Tobacco Control. <http://tinyurl.com/yc3zrtv8>. Accessed May 29, 2020.

³⁷ Dreaper, J. New Global Fund to Help Countries Defend Tobacco Control. BBC News. <http://tinyurl.com/y7w5zfn5>. Published March 18, 2015. Accessed May 29, 2020.

TIMELINE & GRAPHIC MAPPING³⁸

1988 to 1999



KEY	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

³⁸ All campaign images and information accessed at World Health Organization websites including <https://www.who.int/tobacco/wntd/previous/en/> and related links – May 2020

2000 to 2005

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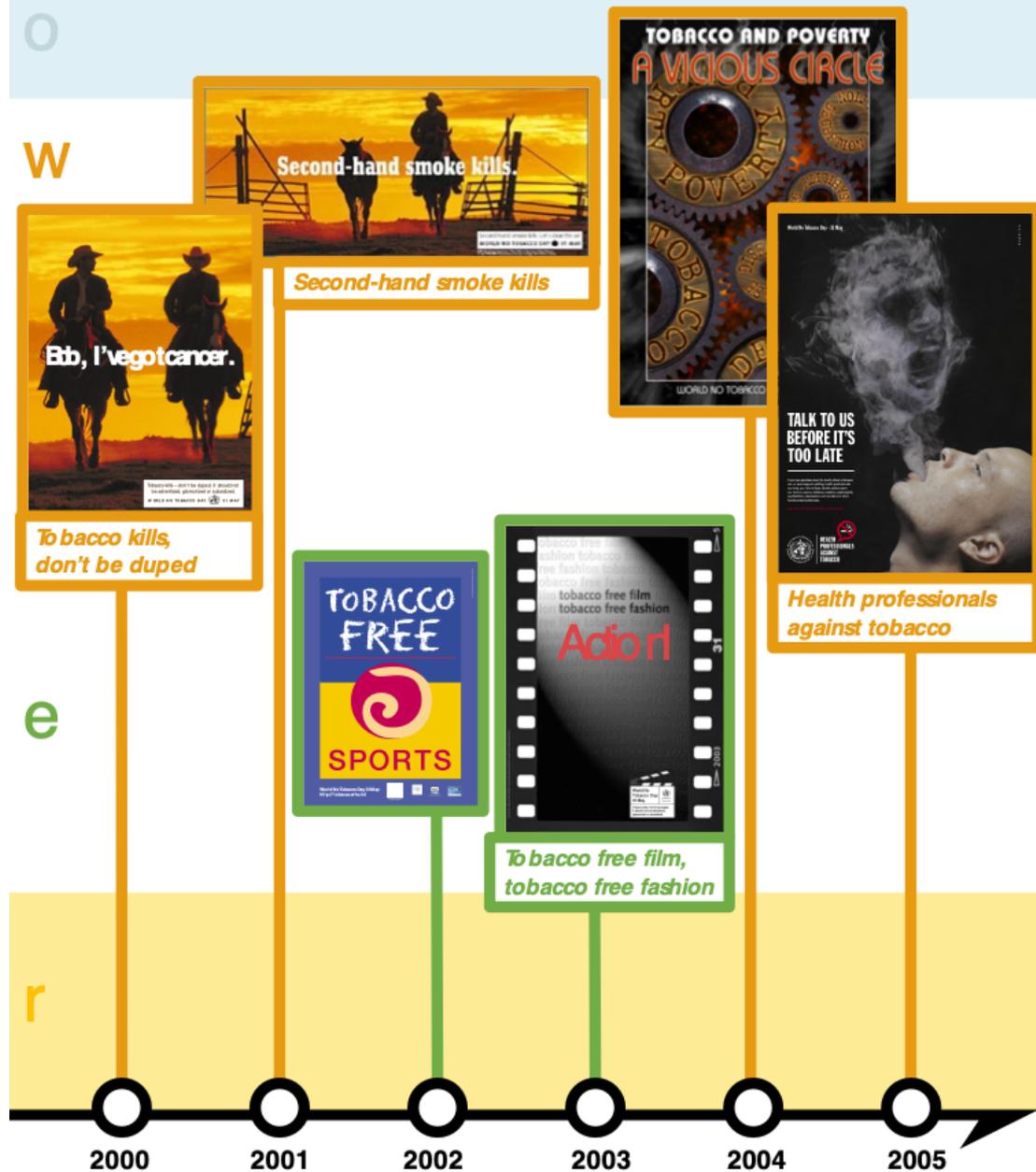
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2006 to 2009³⁹



³⁹ World Health Organization Framework Convention on Tobacco Control. Sessions of the Conference of the Parties to the WHO FCTC. <http://tinyurl.com/y7rtltfx>. Accessed May 29, 2020.

2010 to 2015⁴⁰



⁴⁰ World Health Organization Framework Convention on Tobacco Control. Sessions of the Conference of the Parties to the WHO FCTC. <http://tinyurl.com/y7rtlfx>. Accessed May 29, 2020.

2016 to 2020⁴¹



⁴¹ World Health Organization Framework Convention on Tobacco Control. Sessions of the Conference of the Parties to the WHO FCTC. <http://tinyurl.com/y7rtlfx>. Accessed May 29, 2020.

SUMMARY & CONCLUSIONS

This paper gives a brief review of historical campaign themes and examines the relationship between WNTD, inputs by philanthropic entities, and international policy measures.

As illustrated in the graphic timeline, the BI, Bloomberg Philanthropies has been a key influencer in the global tobacco control agenda. With nearly US \$1 billion committed to date, Bloomberg remains the single largest individual donor to global tobacco control. Since its inception in 2008, BI has supported the six MPOWER strategies except ‘O – offer to quit’. It comes as no surprise that tobacco control efforts on the ground have been greatly influenced by BI funding and grants issued to national organizations. Tobacco control groups at the country and regional level rely on this funding to organize and deploy resources to drive policy. We will examine and pinpoint exactly how policy measures are enacted or enforced at the country level, in a follow-up paper.

From a global perspective, there is no documentation available in the public domain on how or who may have a possible influence on setting of WNTD themes by international agencies and/or donors. The shift to MPOWER policy development themes from those related to mass awareness on harms of tobacco use are indicative of a link between Bloomberg funding and the selection of themes of WNTD. Since the first pledge of funding for tobacco control by the Bloomberg Initiative in 2006, all subsequent themes for WNTD have been focused on the PWER components of MPOWER package.

m	-	
p	4	<i>Smoke-free Places</i>
o	2	<i>Encourage Quitting</i>
w	15	<i>Public Education</i>
e	6	<i>Restrict TAPS</i>
r	1	<i>Raise Tobacco Tax</i>
other	5	
TOTAL	32	campaigns

World No Tobacco Day campaign themes

While it is also difficult to unpack the relationship dynamics between BI and global policy measures, the two seem fairly in lockstep with one another with BI funding having impacted the work done by WHO and other partners for tobacco control.⁴² According to the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) website, “WHO and partners mark World No Tobacco Day (WNTD), highlighting the health and

⁴² Tobacco Free Initiative - Work of WHO with countries <https://www.who.int/tobacco/about/partners/bloomberg/en/> Accessed May 29, 2020.

additional risks associated with tobacco use, and advocating for effective policies to reduce tobacco consumption.”⁴³ A deeper look at and analysis of news items and campaigns conducted across the globe by tobacco control advocates demonstrates the use of WNTD themes for policy advocacy influencing, not only public opinion, but also policy makers across the globe.

Aside from the single instance in 2018, where the Bloomberg launch of STOP preceded the COP8 decision on industry interference countermeasures, all tobacco control initiatives funded by BI succeed and align with COP decisions. The work not directly linked to the MPOWER package has also been done, albeit with a gap between the policy and its implementation for example, e.g., the Anti-Tobacco Litigation Fund was not launched until 7 years after the COP3 decision on industry interference and 3 years after the Seoul Declaration at COP5. As COP takes place in the fall (months after WNTD on May 31st) each year, it is reasonable to conclude that WNTD themes set the stage for subsequent campaigns by BI-funded organizations for policy advocacy and influencing public opinion.

A relationship between WNTD themes and campaigns developed on these and COP decisions can be observed extending as far back as COP2. As illustrated in the graphic timeline, just 1 month after the 2007 “Smoke-free Inside” WNTD campaign called for 100% smoke-free indoor workplaces and public places, COP2 adopted guidelines on protection from secondhand smoke exposure. Similarly, the 2008 youth-targeted “Break the Tobacco Marketing Net” campaign shed light on industry marketing practices and was followed by a COP3 decision on tobacco advertising, promotion, and sponsorship (TAPS). “Smoking is Ugly” (2010) saw COP4 adoption of guidelines on education, communication, training, and public awareness. The 2012 WNTD theme was reflected in the Seoul Declaration on industry interference at COP5. A COP6, a decision addressed tobacco pricing and tax—once again—in line with the WNTD “Raise Tobacco Tax, Lower Death and Disease” campaign earlier that year. Finally, the 2016 WNTD campaign focused on plain packaging with graphic health warnings and was followed by COP7 guidelines on product disclosures in November of that same year. While it can be argued that this alone may not be enough to conclude a direct causal relationship between the two, it is reasonable to suggest a correlation and that the WNTD theme is a good indicator of the global tobacco control agenda for any given year. It can also be postulated that BI, being the main donor for all tobacco control activities, plays a background role in the selection of these WNTD themes.

Each year, the WHO selects a theme for the day in order to create a more unified global message for WNTD. Experience and trends indicate that this theme then becomes the central component of the WHO’s tobacco-related agenda for the following year. Upon announcement of a WNTD theme and development of a unified campaign, policy measures reflective of this theme are adopted at the global level, and philanthropies step in to support implementation on the ground. And while this may not always be the most efficient, balanced, or transparent process, it is a formula that has been in place over the last 15 years. This becomes even more complex because no details are available about the process that leads to the decision on the theme for WNTD for that year. If it is to follow the agenda of the WHO on tobacco control for the next year, then it can be deduced that the agenda since the initiation of BI funding in 2016 and endorsement of MPOWER policy package has been to prioritize BI-

⁴³ Pan American Health Organization. World No Tobacco Day 2017, Tobacco – A Threat to Development. <https://tinyurl.com/ydx53jcc>. Published May 31, 2017. Accessed May 29, 2020.

focused areas of work. This is further strengthened by the trend seen for BI funding as the grants program launched by BI in 2016 does not support “O, offer to quit” as a strategy and has not funded any grants until now for “cessation” and/or helping smokers to quit. It is not clear whether consultations take place with stakeholders or even governments, or if the priorities of major funders are taken on board. Given the current trends, it is reasonable to expect that all parties involved will protect and preserve the current working dynamic.

WNTD, is an opportunity to discuss and find innovative solutions to save the millions of lives lost to combustible tobacco. This day should be seen as a platform to accelerate an end to smoking with pragmatic approaches and innovative solutions to help them quit and save lives. It is imperative for all stakeholders to use WNTD to reach out to 1.3 billion tobacco users especially the 80% of these living in low- and middle-income countries⁴⁴

WNTD, which takes place every year, serves as an opportunity to empathetically engage with people who smoke and to assist them in their cessation journeys. From a public health perspective, this means embracing the full range of tools that may help smokers proceed toward a healthier, smoke-free future. WNTD themes with limited focus and outreach do not serve the purpose of accelerating an end to smoking. If the trend to align WNTD themes with priorities of one agency or group while neglecting the views of many continues, the day which can make a difference will certainly become a wasted opportunity.

⁴⁴ WHO Fact Sheets on tobacco <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/tobacco> accessed 29th may 2020