

Vital Strategies

Agenda 8.4- Regional Strategic Framework for combating smokeless tobacco, novel nicotine products and areca nut in the WHO South-East Asia Region

Chair, Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Combating smokeless tobacco (SLT), novel nicotine products and use of areca nut in Southeast Asia requires a multi-stakeholder and multi-pronged strategy that addresses their high prevalence, cultural acceptance, and significant health risks. The region accounts for roughly 86% of the world's SLT users causing 479 466 annual deaths (Kaur J et al). Policy and regulatory measures require comprehensive bans. Many countries have implemented bans on certain SLT products. Further, taxes on all SLT products, strong pictorial health warnings and uniform packaging, test and disclose the contents of SLT products, elimination of illicit trade, mass media campaigns, and expansion of cessation services are challenges in the region. The use of Areca Nut with or without tobacco has further caused immense suffering in many countries of SEA and WP Region. Around 224 million adults in India alone consume areca nut with increased health risks. Advocacy, awareness campaigns, community-based strategies, enforcement of regulations on sale and availability of areca nuts are crucial to control its use. Novel Nicotine products like E-cigarette, Heated Tobacco Products (HTPs) and oral nicotine pouches are posing a major challenge to the existing tobacco control efforts in the region. A systematic review showed a substantial prevalence of e-cigarette use among adolescents in Southeast Asia varying from 3.3% to 11.8%. In the SEA region, the use and availability of nicotine pouches vary, with no specific laws in most countries while other nations are developing regulatory frameworks. The countries like India, Maldives, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Timor-Leste have banned e-cigarettes but there are major challenges to enforcement.

Vital Strategies with its presence and support to implement WHO FCTC/MPOWER across the SEA region would further like to strengthen its engagement and collaborations with country governments, WHO SEARO, and other partners and assist them to develop and implement multi-pronged Regional Strategic Framework to combat these challenges of SLT, areca nut and novel nicotine products in the region.