

Will Plain Packaging make a difference?

By: The World Health Organization (WHO) Namibia

Advocacies at global and national levels to control tobacco and minimize its health impacts have witnessed tremendous progress despite pressure from the Tobacco Industry. In Africa:

- 26 countries have banned advertising in public places
- 22 countries have banned on tobacco promotion and sponsorship
- 49.6% of the schools include tobacco use prevention in school curriculum

Tobacco use however remains the leading preventable cause of disease, disability and death. As is true with any other treaties, the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control confers legal obligations on its Parties – that is, on the countries such as Namibia who have formally acceded to it. The WHO Framework Convention and its guidelines provide the foundation for countries to implement effective tobacco control policies and manage tobacco control programmes. Member States in the African Region are developing and enforcing tobacco control measures based on their obligations under the Convention.



Namibia has made big strides towards reducing the burden of tobacco on its population. However, the fight has just begun with the implementation of the tobacco control regulations in April 2014. It has also increased tax on tobacco products. Namibia is well poised to further strengthen the fight against the tobacco through ratification of the Protocol to Eliminate Illicit Trade in Tobacco Products. Namibia has also adopted the pictorial warnings and evidence suggests that those pictorial warnings significantly increase people's awareness of the harms of tobacco use and reduce the number of children/youth who begin to smoke.

With the 2016 World No Tobacco Day WHO introduced a new measure in tobacco control- Plain (standardized) Packaging. Plain packaging of tobacco products refers to measures that restrict or prohibit the use of logos, colors, brand images or promotional information on packaging other than brand names and product names displayed in a standard color and font style.

Plain packaging is an important demand reduction measure that reduces the attractiveness of tobacco products, restricts use of tobacco packaging as a form of tobacco advertising and promotion, limits misleading packaging and labelling, and increases the effectiveness of health warnings.

To date, only three countries have plain packaging globally. These are Australia (in 2011), Ireland (in 2016), and United Kingdom (May 2016). Scientific evidence is available to show that the design features on tobacco packages make products more attractive, promote the product, cultivate brand identity and influence the decision to start smoking, especially among young people and women.

Australian officials announced that the nation's daily smoking rate, among people aged 14 years and older, declined from 15.1% to 12.8% between 2010 and 2013. The drop in the smoking rate shows that the plain-packaging law enforced at the end of 2012 as well as the 25% tax increase Australia instituted in 2010 are working.

Namibia is considering introducing plain packaging on tobacco products and with increased law enforcement; the country will further reduce the burden of tobacco on its population.