



TOWARDS SMOKING CESSATION: EXPANDING SRI LANKA'S 'TOBACCO-FREE ZONES'

Sri Lanka has experienced a significant fall in the overall smoking rate among males - from 40.5% in 2005 to 28.4% in 2018.¹ Yet worryingly, tobacco smoking prevalence is significantly high among certain groups (referred to as 'Last Mile Smokers') and the country loses more than 20,000 lives every year as a result of tobacco-related diseases.² The presence of high prevalence smoking groups highlights the need for successful and sustainable tobacco control measures. Smoking cessation interventions play a significant role in effective tobacco smoking controlling. Different approaches in cessation should be used in different settings – and in combination with one another to improve the effectiveness. Currently, Sri Lanka has a wide range of cessation support. However, IPS studies³ on tobacco control show that there is a vast unmet demand for tobacco cessation services and community-based smoking cessation interventions are more suitable in the Sri Lankan context.

In this backdrop, an IPS study 'Tobacco Free Zones: A Pathway to Tobacco Free Sri Lanka' proposes strengthening and expanding the '**Tobacco-Free Zone**' (TFZ) as a policy measure for tobacco smoking cessation in Sri Lanka. TFZs are a community-based tobacco smoking cessation intervention currently being implemented in several locations in Sri Lanka. The National Authority on Tobacco and

Alcohol of Sri Lanka (NATA) initiated this in 2016 and is the main agency responsible for implementation. TFZs are coordinated and managed by Public Health Inspectors (PHIs) at the community level. The TFZ approach is to have a series of discussions, led by the PHI of the area and community members, with retail shop owners to stop the sale of tobacco-smoking related products. Once all the parties come to an agreement, the area is declared as a tobacco free zone. Further activities on tobacco control such as awareness campaigns are carried out with the involvement of community members.

POLICY ISSUES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Implementation bottlenecks - Lack of support from the community members, lack of technical competencies of the PHIs in carrying out a community-based programmes, lack of legal knowledge to resolve legal matters, heavy workload of the PHIs, and lack of support from other government officers, are some key bottlenecks in implementing TFZs. Enhancing technical capacity and providing legal support to PHIs, getting dedicated community members to help PHIs TFZ-related matters, involving government officers who work closely with the community (e.g., Grama Niladhari, Public Health Midwives, and officers in charge of youth and sports activities) are some important measures that can be taken to smoothen the implementation bottlenecks

¹Alcohol and Drug Information Centre. (2019). *Trend Survey on Tobacco, Annual Trend Survey on Tobacco Smoking in Sri Lanka-2018*. Colombo: Alcohol and Drug Information Centre.

²RTI International, Ministry of Health, Sri Lanka, United Nations Development Programme, WHO FCTC Secretariat, World Health Organization. (2019). *Investment Case for Tobacco Control in Sri Lanka*. New York: United Nations Development Programme. Retrieved 2020, from <https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/library-page/hiv-aids/investment-case-for-tobacco-control-in-sri-lanka.html>

³Madurawala, S., Karunanayake, C. (2021), Tobacco Smoking Cessation: Lessons and Policy Options for Sri Lanka, Health and Education Research Series: No. 19, Institute of Policy Studies of Sri Lanka, Colombo; Madurawala, S., Karunanayake, C., Thilanka, C. (2020), Tobacco Smoking in Sri Lanka: Identifying and understanding the Last Mile Smokers, Health and Education Research Series: No. 18. Institute of Policy Studies of Sri Lanka, Colombo

Issues in Expanding Tobacco Free Zones



- Implementation bottlenecks
- Power structures at the local level
- No monitoring & evaluation
- No proper costing
- Lack of sustainability
- Industry interferences

Power structure around TFZ at the local level

- Understanding the power structure around TFZs and identifying supporters and spoilers are important. Such a power mapping would give a clear understanding of each actor's position.

Evaluation- TFZs help the community in many ways; it controls tobacco smoking, enhances the overall health and economic status and community members also benefit from greater social cohesion through participation in community activities. But at present, there are no measures to quantify their effectiveness and the impact. Their success is measured based on personal judgments that are subjective and thus developing indicators to measure the effectiveness of TFZs is recommended. A tool such as a log frame can be used to improve planning, implementation, management, monitoring and evaluation.

Costing- TFZs are recognised as a very cost-effective cessation intervention. It does not require a huge financial investment either at the implementation or for continuation. However, it was found that there is no proper costing done on TFZs. A costing should be done by quantifying all aspects covered to validate the cost-effectiveness of the programme and for future references and appraisals.

Sustainability- Even though TFZs are meant to be a community-based intervention, it is highly dependent on PHIs. This affects the sustainability of TFZs

immensely, especially when the PHIs get transferred to another area. To address this issue, more community empowerment and involvement are needed right from the initiation and PHIs should ideally play an advisory role.

Industry interferences- The industry uses tactics to stop or discourage TFZs at various levels. Some PHIs have experienced verbal and physical harassments including implicit death threats while some were offered unethical gifts. Further, community members, especially the retail shop owners have become targets of the industry (e.g., Abhisheka programme by the Ceylon Tobacco Company (CTC)⁴. Hence it is important to empower PHIs and community members should be taught to identify industry tactics and how to deal with them. A legal support system needs to be established to help PHIs to resolve legal matters with the industry. NATA can work on establishing such a mechanism to help PHIs.

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⁴Abhisheka recognises the high selling retailers and provides various incentives to upgrade their businesses