

# From the Field: Building and Maintaining Strong Networks to Address Tobacco, Poverty, and Development



## **From the Field: Building and Maintaining Strong Networks to Address Tobacco, Poverty, and Development**

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## 1 Introduction

This guide seeks to address some of the most common questions related to networking. In doing so, it shares the experiences of organizations that are working successfully to recruit, train, and mentor new organizations in tobacco control – particularly for work related to tobacco and poverty. It also offers ideas about how to strengthen networks and increase the active and effective involvement of organizations working through tobacco control networks.

### 1.1 Why networks?

Recruiting, training, and mentoring the next generation of effective tobacco control advocates remains an imperative. While it is sometimes easier to work on one's own, tobacco control is far more effective when carried out as part of a larger team. New energy, ideas, and creativity are always needed. It is thus an essential part of the work of existing advocates to bring others into the movement.

When we wrote the *South to South Tobacco Control Program Lessons Learned* book in 2006, it was clear that one of the key factors in the project's success was that even when they were based in capital cities, our partners worked effectively throughout the entire country because they had built the capacity of smaller NGOs and linked them together through a network. The network acted as a web extending even into

difficult-to-reach areas.<sup>1</sup>

Trying to recruit new organizations, train them, keep them motivated, and ensure that they work effectively is no easy task. Among other challenges is the fact that many donors may not understand the importance of maintaining and expanding networks, and that maintaining a network requires not only a good deal of time but also funding.

This guide is meant to provide assistance and support for the difficult process of network building and strengthening. It was developed as a series of questions and answers, based on responses to a questionnaire that we circulated to tobacco control advocates around the world. Additional contributions were collected during meetings that we held with our partners during the World Conferences on Tobacco or Health (Mumbai in 2009 and Singapore in 2012) and the World Lung Conference (Cancun in 2009). Mini-case studies are inserted throughout to provide key examples and models of successful networks, as well as some of the challenges that they have faced.

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<sup>1</sup> Efroymson, D. *HealthBridge's South-to-South Tobacco Control Program: Lessons Learned*. HealthBridge: Ottawa, 2007. <http://www.healthbridge.ca/lessons%20learned.pdf>

## 2 Networks: Raison d'être

A network or coalition is a group of two or more organizations and/or individuals that are linked together in some way through a common purpose or issue. Its composition of different organizations allows for a broader reach, in terms of both geography and topics covered. Different network members can take on different activities or different sub-issues, each of which contributes to the larger network goal. They can also target different localities or different socio-political audiences. Ongoing work on broad or multi-faceted issues can therefore be more effective if dealt with through a network rather than by individual organizations.

### 2.1 How is a network structured?

Some networks are formally structured; that is, with the day-to-day functioning of the network, its activities, and the relationship between its members managed through a secretariat or other management mechanism. Other networks are informally structured, with no centralized management function guiding their work; in this case, network members interact on their own, within the confines of their shared interests.

A network may work virtually – primarily by e-mail and other non-face-to-face contact – or it may engage its members more directly through regular face-to-face meetings and activities.

The Rede Tobacco Zero (RTZ), a virtual network of about 100 organizations interested in tobacco control, was created in Brazil in December 2003. Initially dependent on grants and managed by volunteers, its core membership sought a balance between a potentially unwieldy consensus-based process and a potentially alienating centralized decision-making process. In the end, the group decided on a coalition model comprised of a consensus-based platform supported by a strategic decision-making Secretariat. The network has since evolved into a legally incorporated NGO managed through two fully operational offices, changed its name to **Aliança de Controle do Tabagismo** (ACT), and engaged a broad range of organizations to facilitate a multi-sectoral approach to tobacco control. Today the network includes more than 300 organizational members. The national –level network also includes sub-networks that focus on specific needs and issues.

The **Tobacco and Poverty Research Network**, on the other hand, is a virtual, largely electronic network of researchers, advocates, and other individuals interested in exploring the links between tobacco, poverty, and development. Initiated in 2009 as part of a research for advocacy capacity building project, the network is moderated by HealthBridge and includes more than 50 individual members from countries throughout Asia, Africa, and the Americas. The purpose of the network is to provide an open forum through which researchers, advocates, and others working in tobacco can share their research results, ideas, experiences, challenges, and solutions for exploring and addressing issues related to tobacco and poverty. Information is shared via a regular email newsletter and, as opportunities are presented, through face-to-face meetings at international and regional conferences or similar events.

## 2.2 What kinds of activities are best performed through a network?

Working via a network enables individual organizations to contribute where their strengths are, rather than trying to address all aspects of an issue by themselves. Organizations with legal expertise can be engaged to support the legal aspects of a given initiative, while those with a logistical flair can take the lead in organizing events. Other organizations excel at training and capacity building or at working with the media. Another advantage to a network is that those organizations with strengths in a particular field can train those who are weaker in that area, in a mutually collaborative way, so that rather than one group always taking the lead, network members can support each other.

When one considers the various activities that must be undertaken to address a given issue, it becomes clear that a network approach lessens the workload on individual organizations while playing to the strengths of each partner. The types of activities involved in research for policy advocacy that are best undertaken through a network include:

- **Identifying which sub-issues to address and how to address them.** Each organization in a network may have a different perspective, based on its experiences, areas of expertise, previous activities, and/or staffing mix. Although it may take some time to come to an agreement, a network approach often results in a group of organizations being able to take a broad rather than narrow focus on the issue of interest, with different members

approaching the issue from different, but complementary, perspectives. In other words, the sum of the parts is much greater than what could be contributed or achieved by a single organization.

- **Drawing the attention of concerned stakeholders.** This is partly an issue of “degrees of separation”: within a network, there is a greater possibility that someone will have a direct or fairly direct link to important stakeholders, and/or possess the skills needed to gain their attention. What may be difficult or impossible to achieve on one’s own becomes possible within a group.
- **Turning non-issues into issues of public concern.** For many years, development agencies and national ministries of health focused on communicable diseases because the threat that they posed was immediate; now, the focus has shifted to the longer-term problem of non-communicable diseases. This has happened, in part, because of the advocacy efforts of strong, diverse, and active health and development networks. In a similar manner, networks of organizations engaged in environmental research and advocacy have drawn attention to climate change concerns.
- **Building pressure for policy change through public awareness-raising and sensitization.** Individual organizations have limited reach and impact. At the same time, without broad-based public demand, there is little reason for policymakers to make changes. As different organizations have access to and respond to different segments of the population, raising public demand for change can



best be achieved through a network that draws on the reach of each of its members.

- **Policy and media advocacy.** Policy advocacy occurs both directly, through meetings and correspondence, and indirectly, through the mass media. In both cases, a network approach provides greater access to both policymakers and the media, as each member organization does its part while presenting a common message. The media is much more likely to give attention to an organized network than to individual organizations.
- **Effective monitoring and implementation of law and policy.** Some people argue that there is no point in working towards the development of new laws since they will not be enforced anyway. A more positive perspective is that it is not enough to work for law passage; one must also work on enforcement. To be successful at both passage and enforcement is to make a genuine contribution to democracy in the sense of increasing public involvement in the governing process. Rather than relying solely on government, it is important to show that civil society can lend a hand. Working through a network allows for the effective monitoring of law implementation and enforcement at many levels and locations simultaneously.

If we succeed in strengthening coordination between organizations, we can avoid duplication of efforts, skills, and human and financial resources. Basing networks on collaboration and partnerships can generate greater impact, both in terms of the issues

addressed and the geographical regions reached. Or as one of this guide’s contributors said, “without a doubt collaboration among individuals or organizations is the most effective manner to achieve policy change in tobacco control.”

*The Resource Center for Primary Health Care (RECPHEC), a Nepali NGO committed to the idea of health for all Nepali people, established the **Health Rights & Tobacco Control District Network (HRTC)** to advocate to government agencies and to create awareness in rural communities about health rights and tobacco control issues. The network’s activities include addressing legal and advocacy needs for the effective implementation of the Free Health Service Program and the national tobacco control law. As one component of the network, RECPHEC established a Youth Watch Group in the 53 districts in which the HRTC is active. Through the group, more than 400 youth have been mobilized to monitor the implementation and enforcement of tobacco control measures at the district level. While RECPHEC facilitates and monitors the network’s activities, organizes events, and maintains ongoing communication with network members, the individual organizations and groups within the network are responsible for implementing activities in their respective districts and regions.*

### 3 Networks: Membership & Recruitment

The issue of membership raises a number of questions. There would be little argument about some basic qualities important for network members. These include not having any financial or other links to the tobacco industry, their willingness to work on difficult issues, and their ethical framework. Beyond the basics, however, many questions could arise. For example, for a network to succeed, its member organizations should have defined roles. Ideally, a ‘win-win’ relationship would ensue in which all network members, as well as the network itself, benefit from the association. Part of this success also involves a compatible long term vision, in which the different members share similar long-term goals. While diversity is essential, too much divergence of views could make consensus difficult. There are also some strategic issues regarding organizational size and the types of organization to recruit, which are addressed below.

#### 3.1 What sizes of organizations are most appropriate for a tobacco control network?

The types of organizations best suited for a network depend in large part upon the type of work that the network plans to do. The network’s objective should help to define the types of organisations to include. Of course, a network’s goals may change over time, particularly if successes are achieved and lead to the identification of new or follow up work. Advocacy success, rather than leading to a network’s dissolution, could and should lead to new goals to guide the network’s future work and membership.

- ✳ For **policy advocacy**, it is beneficial to include at least one large NGO that has already established its credibility at the national level with decision-makers. However, many large NGOs are fairly conservative and may be reluctant to engage in advocacy that brings unwanted attention or pressure on their other activities. Finding the right large NGO to include may take time and negotiation, and successful advocacy can occur even without its inclusion.
- ✳ For **awareness raising** and sensitization, to build grass-roots support, and to take on issues that are too politically sensitive for large NGOs to address, small local NGOs are beneficial to networks. These organizations have the advantage of being more flexible and are often willing and keen to engage in advocacy. The parallel disadvantage is that they may have little in-house capacity, few staff, fewer resources, and have little established credibility among decision-makers. However, experience in some countries is that even the tiniest NGOs can be effective advocates, and that willingness to be active and outspoken – and to be mentored by larger, more experienced organizations – is more important than material or human resources.
- ✳ In terms of **cross-cutting work**, some argue that larger organizations (25-30 staff), are the most appropriate to target for inclusion in a tobacco control network. Organizations of that size can contribute to policy development and enforcement. Their strengths include having skilled staff with diverse backgrounds and more capacity to be

involved in various ways, such as advocacy, research, and monitoring and evaluation. Others argue that many small NGOs can be more effective than a few large ones. Ultimately, what works for a given network depends more on how the member organizations interact, communicate, and support a common goal than on their size.

*The **Bangladesh Anti-Tobacco Alliance** (BATA) has learned that a coalition comprised primarily of smaller NGOs works best in the Bangladeshi context. Smaller groups tend to be more flexible, which makes it easier for them to come on board. They are more likely to take risks and a strong stance on issues. They are also better able to shape their agenda to be complementary to that of the coalition. Small amounts of assistance from coalition partners, such as material and human resources, go a long way for smaller organizations and are greatly appreciated. The BATA network now consists of more than 700 affiliated members, most of which are small, local NGOs that represent very specific interests or local perspectives. It is their interest in, and dedication to, tobacco control that keeps them together.*

### 3.2 Working with government partners

Tobacco control can greatly benefit if mutually-beneficial and collaborative working relationships can be established between NGOs and governmental organizations (GO) responsible for tobacco control. Indeed, tobacco control work cannot be successful without strong collaboration between government and non-governmental agencies.

Since the most effective ways to reduce tobacco use are through laws and tax increases, government action is necessary. Yet governments often require the support of NGOs to pass, implement, and enforce strong policies. In some situations and countries, a natural conflict appears to exist between GOs and NGOs, yet positive working relationships can also exist. NGOs must, as much as possible, develop close relationships with government officials while still retaining the freedom to criticize those governments for specific actions or the lack thereof.

One effective way to enhance GO-NGO collaboration might be to include government representation in a tobacco control network, either formally or informally. By providing assistance, information, and support to government officials through a network, NGOs can enter into a positive, mutually-beneficial relationship that greatly enhances the possibility of working closely together to advance tobacco control.



The **Tobacco Control Working Group (TCWG)**, established in 2003 in Vietnam, has successfully brought together NGOs, WHO, UN agencies, and the Vietnam Committee on Smoking and Health (VINACOSH), the government agency responsible for tobacco control. The presence of VINACOSH in the Working Group is extremely important in ensuring communication and collaboration across governmental sectors. Its core “active” members remain VINACOSH, WHO, HealthBridge Vietnam, CDS, and the Viet Nam Public Health Association (VPHA). One of the secrets to the success of the working group may be in its name and what that name means. This is neither a formal coalition nor an alliance. The group does not carry out joint activities. Its mandate is seemingly not ambitious: to meet regularly to discuss what different people are doing, what challenges they face, and to share ideas. Removing the expectation of collaboration also removes much of the jealousy that might otherwise exist in terms of who is being funded by whom, who is taking the lead, and who is getting the recognition. As a result – and also due to a high level of friendliness among the individuals involved – it is possible for VINACOSH (government), the WHO, and NGOs to sit together around the table as equals.

### 3.3 Attracting non-tobacco-control organizations

Aside from organizational size, it is crucial to consider the breadth and depth of experience and expertise that different groups can bring to a network. It is important to look beyond traditional tobacco control groups to organizations that work on issues that may, at first glance, appear to be only peripherally associated with tobacco control. For example, in recent

years, research has shown the clear relationships that exist between tobacco, poverty, and development; adequately addressing these relationships necessitates working with poverty alleviation and development organizations.<sup>2</sup> While non-tobacco control groups may not immediately perceive a connection between tobacco and poverty, the poor almost universally smoke the most, can least afford to do so, and are most harmed by the production and use of tobacco. Similarly, the leading contributor to non-communicable diseases (NCD) remains tobacco use. Organizations engaged in NCD prevention advocacy can contribute significantly to tobacco control advocacy, while also gaining lessons learned from the tobacco control experience that could be applied to other NCD risk factors.

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<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Roy A, Efroymson D, Jones L, et al. “Gainfully Employed? An Inquiry into Bidi-dependent Livelihoods in Bangladesh,” *Tobacco Control* 21, no.3 (2012): 313-317; Jones L and Efroymson D. *Making the Tobacco and Poverty Link: Results from Research for Advocacy Projects in Africa, Asia, and Latin America*. Ottawa: HealthBridge, 2011. [www.healthbridge.ca](http://www.healthbridge.ca); Efroymson D, Pham THA, Jones L, et al. “Tobacco and Poverty: Evidence from Vietnam.” *Tobacco Control* 20, no. 4 (2011): 296-301; Hoang MA, Le TT, Tran T, Kinh HV, Efroymson D, FitzGerald S. *Tobacco over Education: An Examination of the Opportunity Losses for Smoking Households*. Hanoi: HealthBridge 2005; WHO. *Tobacco and Poverty: A Vicious Circle*. Geneva: WHO, 2004. [www.who.int/tobacco/communications/events/wntd/2004/en/wntd2004\\_brochure\\_en.pdf](http://www.who.int/tobacco/communications/events/wntd/2004/en/wntd2004_brochure_en.pdf); Efroymson D, ed. *Tobacco and Poverty: Observations from India and Bangladesh*. Dhaka: HealthBridge 2002; Efroymson D, Ahmed S, Townsend J, et al. “Hungry for Tobacco: An Analysis of the Economic Impact of Tobacco on the Poor in Bangladesh.” *Tobacco Control* 10 (2001): 212-217.

**HealthBridge and WBB Trust** have produced a *Tobacco Control Manual* that explains the linkages between tobacco and other issues. The manual offers some simple suggestions about how to incorporate tobacco control issues and approaches into other types of work. Examples include making offices smoke-free, encouraging members of microcredit/ savings groups to give up tobacco use, and adding information about tobacco control to printed materials.<sup>3</sup> Guides such as these provide a significant amount of information that can be used and adapted by tobacco control networks to attract new members.<sup>3</sup>

A common, but misguided, approach that has been used by some tobacco control organizations to develop new network partnerships involves telling other organizations that tobacco use is ‘the biggest health concern in the world.’ While it is true that tobacco is the largest cause of preventable death, this does not mean that other threats to health are not also important or should take a back seat to tobacco.

It is much more helpful to look for common linkages. For instance, tobacco control can be portrayed as a topic relevant to poverty (e.g., the opportunity costs of buying cigarettes), to human rights (e.g., workers exposed to second-hand smoke or the miserable working conditions of tobacco farmers and producers), to women’s issues (the tobacco industry now targets

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<sup>3</sup> Efroymson, D., E. Must, and Flora Tanudyaya. *A Burning Issue: Tobacco Control and Development, A Manual for Non-Governmental Organizations*. WBB Trust: Dhaka, 2001.  
<http://www.healthbridge.ca/tcmanual.pdf>

women in many countries; women’s high rates of exposure to second-hand smoke), to children’s issues (children’s exposure to smoke; tobacco-related child labour), to the environment (cutting down of trees to grow and cure tobacco; the many chemicals involved in tobacco production), and so on.

It is also important to try to offer support. That is, when asking people to sign a petition, come to a meeting, or join a group, be prepared to offer similar assistance to the group that is being approached. Most people are too busy to make a major effort outside their main area of work, but just as we are asking people to give a bit of time to our cause, so we should be prepared to offer some to theirs. An approach of mutual assistance is far more likely to help than just an assumption that everyone should help without that help being reciprocated.

*In Brazil, ACT's staff represents a wide range of sectoral and professional expertise, including medical professionals, agricultural specialists, legal experts, environmental pollution specialists, and journalists. Its network members address tobacco control from different angles and represent a wide range of interests:*

- Health
- Environment
- Consumer issues
- Gender
- Education
- Medical associations
- Legal issues
- Scientific communities
- Small farmers' associations
- Human rights
- Governance

### **3.4 How does a network recruit new partners?**

The growth or expansion of networks is an important condition to ensure the ongoing effectiveness of tobacco control. A network confers a certain amount of legitimacy to the tobacco control movement because it demonstrates that it is constantly evolving in response to ever-changing needs and challenges. Creating and maintaining a network, and constantly integrating new and different types of organizations, is thus an effective approach that helps to ensure that tobacco control itself is addressed from many different angles and perspectives.

To begin the process of building or expanding a network, organizers should:

- 1) Identify potential member organizations that can offer new areas of expertise, new perspectives, or access to new audiences;
- 2) Produce basic materials about the status of tobacco use and production and its effect on the health of the local population and the environment, as well as on effective tobacco control approaches, both globally and in the country served by the network;
- 3) Contact potential network members, give them the basic materials, and suggest that they become involved in tobacco control;
- 4) Maintain contact and request an interview with leaders of the identified organizations; these interviews can transform into work sessions;
- 5) Ensure that you are properly prepared. Know your issue and be prepared to present your case confidently and to answer questions that are likely to be asked. Important issues that must be addressed include the size of the tobacco use and production problem, the consequences of tobacco use and production (health, economic, environmental), and the actions that need to be taken to address these issues. If the country in which the network operates already has a tobacco control law in place, be prepared to clearly present the contents of the law as well as its strengths and weaknesses. Present case studies of successful tobacco control activities,

and describe not only the success but the reasons for it. In addition, discuss the benefits of working through a network rather than individually. Organizations that are not explicitly working on tobacco control issues may not see how they could be involved; demonstrate how their work is impacted by the harmful effects of tobacco use and production, and how addressing tobacco control through a network means that they can contribute to the extent that is appropriate for their own organization. By working with a network, each organization avoids spreading itself too thin, while at the same time gaining exponentially from the work of network partners.

- 6) Once an organization shows an interest in joining the network, it is important to maintain communication and to continue providing information, mentoring, and training to the organization's staff to convince them of the importance of tobacco control work and to guide their early efforts.
- 7) Make sure to present the network's documents (statutes, rules, plan of action), if there are any, to the leaders of partner organizations to ensure that they understand how the network functions. The degree of respect given to the network by its member organizations will ultimately impact its viability and credibility.

Given the political nature of tobacco control work and the risk of industry infiltration, **SOS Tabagisme** in Niger offers the following advice for recruiting new network members:

- ‡ Study the profile of the organizations you seek to recruit or who show an interest in joining. Ensure that there is no clash in vision. It is important to ensure that they have no relationship with the tobacco industry. (On the other hand, an organization may buy a single share in a tobacco company to be able to attend, and protest at, shareholder meetings. Former industry insiders may also be extremely helpful collaborators if they have changed their perspective).
- ‡ Interact with interested organizations to get commitment to working together. It is important to make basic expectations clear from the start, as well as to outline major areas of work.
- ‡ Invite potential network members for seminars or workshops to sensitize them on the issue of concern. This can also be a useful practice when attempting to broaden your geographical base; the easiest way may be to organize workshops in different parts of the country, using that experience as an opportunity not only to train groups but also to assess their interests.
- ‡ Proceed slowly. One may wish to establish a policy that prospective members must engage in a certain number of activities or be active for a fixed duration before gaining formal membership. Or you may keep the network informal. Either way, it is crucial to assess both the quality of the work of the groups you seek to recruit, and the personality of the individuals involved.

## 4 Maintaining a Network

Once a network has been established, it is important to pay attention, on an ongoing basis, to its maintenance. This means not only the day-to-day functioning of the network, but also activities such as engaging members, mentoring, training, capacity building, and information dissemination.

Several specific network maintenance suggestions were made by contributors to this guide. These include:

- Provide, share, and update related information to keep network members interested in tobacco control. To keep a network alive, activities and communication must occur on a regular basis. A neglected organization will easily lose interest and drop out. This also means that while not all organizations can participate in all events, it is important to continue to invite them, and to attempt to organize a range of events that will be of interest to different groups so that all members feel that there is something in the network for them. For instance, some groups may enjoy monthly meetings, while others may never appear; some may enjoy participating in demonstrations or attending seminars, while others prefer to write letters to policymakers or organize their own media events. Giving a wide range of opportunities for participation and showing flexibility in your expectations will help your network to remain diverse and active. If there is a lack of resources for organizing events, then regular contact by e-mail/telephone/social media is necessary. A regular flow of information

through e-mail or other means can help keep members updated and the network alive.

- Regularly conduct one-on-one or small group activities such as meetings. Formal classes may be important in training new organisations; through classes, information, lessons, and experiences are discussed in a systematic and comprehensive manner so that the partners will have the overall look, vision, and perspective on tobacco control.
- Attend conferences and attend and organize district or regional workshops and other events to identify potential future partners and activities.
- Keep in mind that the network must be “process based”, not “project based.” The goal of the network should not be to implement a particular project, but rather to work towards the overall goal of tobacco control.
- Each network member must have a feeling of ownership of the issue. That is, rather than simply belonging to a network, they should feel that they have a vital role to play in the work itself and that they have the ability and right to contribute their opinions to the overall direction of the network.
- ‘Volunteerism with Professional Input’ should be the motto of the network. A professional is someone who gets paid for what they do; those who volunteer their time do not make a less important contribution than those who are paid. What is important is to expect a certain standard regardless of whether or not people are paid; a network should not simply be a hobby to be



carried out in one's free time, but a serious commitment to a joint goal.

*You can use non-monetary advantages to promote network involvement: rather than receiving funds, members can receive credit for their work, be publicized in newspapers and newsletters, gain publicity from materials (e.g. have their name printed on stickers and leaflets), gain access to local government officials, etc.*

#### **4.1 How should an organization manage the resources needed to coordinate a network?**

**W**ithout a doubt, maintaining a network demands extra time and resources beyond that dedicated to the tobacco control work itself. A key technical skill often neglected in tobacco control and other development work is the management of a network, which must be learned to ensure effective cooperation and a genuinely representative program. Assigning one or more staff positions, or specific parts of staff positions, to the operation of a network is often beneficial, as it allows for dedicated time and energy that would otherwise be pulled in too many directions.

The Nepalese organization **RECPHEC** coordinates a network comprised of more than 700 NGO members located in 53 districts. To manage the operation of this vast network, RECPHEC has assigned one staff person to communicate regularly with district network members, to maintain individual files with activity records, and to organize an annual regional meeting during which network members share their experiences and formulate a work plan for the coming year.

In Bangladesh, **WBB Trust** has found that one secret to a strong network is an open house, drop-in policy. Any network member, or organization interested in becoming one, can come to the office at virtually any time and expect both a warm, friendly greeting and some food. Hospitality is thus an essential element in the mix, but while smiles should come cheaply, food does come at a cost. It is not surprising that many donors are not interested in including hospitality lines in budgets, as it is difficult to monitor. However, this is one of the reasons why WBB, similar to RECPHEC, is able to maintain a network with over 700 NGOs. On a visit to Bangladesh, the Indian senior tobacco control advocate Prakash Gupta commented on the importance of being friendly and of treating all members in an equitable manner. This is one part of the formula that does not require extra funding, although it does require a strong organizational and personal commitment to equality and sociability!

Information dissemination is a critical component of managing a network. Members need to be kept up to date not only about the network's activities, but also about what other members are doing, about advances in tobacco control from other regions or countries, and about the tobacco industry's activities. Maintaining a website through which the network members disseminate information, invite discussion, and engage the tobacco control community and the wider public will also help keep a network strong. For example, ACT's website, [www.actbr.org.org](http://www.actbr.org.org), includes detailed tobacco control information, provides downloadable evidence-based fact sheets on a wide range of scientific and political issues, and hosts a blog. The website of the South East Asia Tobacco Control Alliance, [www.seatca.org](http://www.seatca.org), provides similar types of information, focused primarily on South East Asia.

*HealthBridge uses a listserv to disseminate a regular newsletter to the members of the **Tobacco and Poverty Research Network**. The newsletter provides updates about network members' activities, about funding opportunities, and other relevant announcements. Members are encouraged to submit news stories, articles, and other information to the list serve moderator. This member-driven approach complements a parallel pro-active solicitation of information, and allows all members to contribute to the newsletter and thus feel a more active part of the network itself.*

## 4.2 How can jealousy and competition between organizations be managed?

There is a role for healthy competition within a network. When organizations wish to show that they are doing good work, they may be inspired by the actions of others and 'rise to the occasion.' Competing for awards or recognition can bring out positive behaviour. However, competition can all too easily cede to jealousy and weaken the network, particularly when funding is involved. Jealousy is far more likely when the main coordinating organization or person demonstrates bias; it may also occur in any case when a network member feels that its ideas or contributions are being ignored. The key to mitigating jealousy is to emphasize cooperation rather than competition; rather than identifying the best-performing organizations and rewarding them, try to encourage experience sharing across the member organizations and find ways to reinforce the contributions made by all active organizations and individuals.

Other suggestions for reducing jealousy include:

- ✚ Share the network's work plan with all members to avoid overlaps in or duplication of efforts and to save resources. Allowing member organizations to contribute to the work plan's development will make them feel that they are a part of the network, rather than just adjuncts to it. This should help to instil a spirit of cooperation and reduce any sense of competition.
- ✚ Listen to the comments made by network members and address issues as they arise.

Demonstrate that you are willing to take the time to listen, to provide constructive suggestions for improvement, and to build relationships among network members.

- ✚ Provide assistance to different members when required and in an impartial manner to avoid a perception of bias. Each member organization will have different needs. While working with some members may take much of your time, make sure that you leave time and energy for others that do not need as much assistance but which, if ignored, may become disgruntled.

### 4.3 How can management challenges be addressed?

Every collective enterprise involves challenges that must be managed. Oftentimes, appropriately managing challenges can lead to unforeseen opportunities.

Challenge	Mitigation
<i>The weak participation of organizations that gradually disengage from the network.</i>	Letting members disengage will actually strengthen the network over the longer term. All networks see members come and go, if you want to lessen disengagement, follow the suggestions in this guide for increasing active participation.
<i>Slowness or reluctance to pay membership dues.</i>	Use gentle methods such as verbal and written reminders. You can also distribute lists indicating which members' dues are up-to-date.

Challenge	Mitigation
<i>Fear of reprisals by the tobacco industry and its friends.</i>	Allow member organizations to work on the activities with which they are most comfortable. A strong network is comprised of organizations that each take on different tasks, so not everyone needs to be involved in advocacy.
<i>Network politics</i>	Transparent dealings, democratic decision-making, and an open communication system allow all network members to air complaints and feel that their issues are being heard (even if not necessarily addressed to their full satisfaction).
<i>Poor management of network funds, including misuse of network resources.</i>	Transparency, democratic decision-making, and allowing disgruntled members to share their feelings are needed. It may also be wise to arrange for funds to be allocated to specific programs, while network management funds are limited to membership dues, with a clear accounting system to show how funds are spent.
<i>Lack of rotation of the head of the network.</i>	The establishment of a secretariat-type model will help to keep the management of the network separate from the management of any single organization. This will also help to ensure that one member's objectives do not become the network's objectives.

The **Bangladesh Anti-Tobacco Alliance** (Bangladesh Tamak Birodhi Jote) came under heavy and prolonged attack due to jealousy over funding and scholarship opportunities offered to some members. The attacks included a series of anonymous e-mails and a TV and newspaper onslaught. Rather than be put off by the accusations, the hundreds of small local NGOs that had received extensive material and logistic support from the alliance accepted the attack as a challenge, not a disaster. Network members from outside the capital city of Dhaka became more involved in the network as they became aware of the need to actively raise their voices in support of the alliance and to demonstrate that it was not run as an oligarchy. That is, the network members utilized the challenge wisely, resulting in a significant strengthening of the network. Whereas the network had been dominated by a handful of Dhaka-based NGOs, it is now far more broad in nature, and a wide range of individual organizations now play an active role, ensuring a diverse, strong, and effective network.

#### 4.4 Which types of training activities are best?

It is important not only to provide orientation for new partners so that there are clear mutual expectations about the degree and duration of commitment, but also to provide ongoing capacity building for all network members to keep them engaged, to constantly upgrade skills and knowledge, and to be responsive to new industry tactics designed to circumvent tobacco control laws and policies.

Network members will already have certain professional competencies. The use of the word “training” can create the impression of having two

classes in the ‘same boat’: trainer and trainee, generally termed as one who knows and one who lacks certain knowledge and skill. Hence better terms would be ‘experience sharing,’ capacity building, or mentoring, where all members are on equal footing at different times. Experience sharing could take the form of workshops, interaction sessions, or exposure visits (study tours) to visit work sites of other organizations. Workshops provide the added advantage of creating an opportunity to identify new members and establish and strengthen networks.

While much communication and information sharing can take place through other means (e-mail, social media, telephone, even the old-fashioned letter), capacity building and experience sharing should be conducted face to face, as it allows for interaction among the participants, gives them a chance to learn more, and should result in better outcomes for the network and the participants. People need to see and interact with each other in person. Though organizing such events can be expensive, it is vital to do so for the sake of an active, strong network.

To complement formal training workshops, another mentoring approach is the production of guides or ‘Lessons Learned’ manuals. HealthBridge, for example, has developed several guides that provide instructions for using research for advocacy.<sup>4</sup> A complementary publication demonstrates how these guides have been

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<sup>4</sup> Efrogmson D, FitzGerald S, Jones L. *Tobacco and Poverty: Research for Advocacy Guidelines*. Ottawa: HealthBridge, 2010; Efrogmson, D. *Using Media and Research for Advocacy: Low Cost Ways to Increase Success*. HealthBridge: Ottawa, 2006.

put into practice, together with the subsequent research and advocacy results.<sup>5</sup>

*ACT uses regular networking meetings as an opportunity to build the capacity of its members. Capacity building topics are wide-ranging and include both working methods (such as maintaining a network and working with the media) and technical training on specific issues (taxation/prices, gender, and legislation). ACT's members also learn through one-on-one contacts with international technical advisors which provide motivation and inspiration in addition to technical skills building. ACT has also found that study tours to Canada are helpful, as they provide opportunities for direct information exchange with experts about issues such as litigation, advertising bans, crop substitution programs, human rights, and second-hand smoke. Taking a networking-based approach to capacity building has proved successful in strengthening relationships among alliance members. It also allows for the emergence of leaders for particular issue areas.*

*BATA member organizations take a mutually supportive approach to capacity building. This includes training and mentoring on both technical tobacco control issues (such as law development, implementation, and monitoring) and operational support (such as letter writing skills, presentation skills, using the media, proposal writing, and project implementation). This approach has strengthened relationships among and between alliance members.*

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<sup>5</sup> Jones L and Efroymsen D. *Making the Tobacco and Poverty Link: Results from Research for Advocacy Projects in Africa, Asia, and Latin America*. Ottawa: HealthBridge, 2011.

#### 4.5 Pearls of wisdom: network building, recruiting, training, and mentoring of new organizations for tobacco control

The following includes anecdotes, ideas, and suggestions provided by the many contributors to this guide about their experiences in building and maintaining networks.

- Share resources, materials, ideas, and information widely and regularly both within and beyond the network.
- Print materials such as stickers in the name of local NGOs to give them ownership of the materials. This will also make the materials more relevant to their direct constituents.
- Have a Secretariat that operates as both a resource clearinghouse and an open house to encourage people from around the country to drop in for discussion, assistance, and support.
- Working to support the government is much more effective than simply criticizing it. Encourage network members to write thank you letters and otherwise show their appreciation to those policymakers and bureaucrats who take a proactive stance on tobacco control.
- Where possible, running a Secretariat with highly specialized staff across several sectors makes it easier to be trusted by other organizations, which then allows the Secretariat to speak on their behalf. This will be easier to achieve when using the principle of voluntary professionalism (the



network should be based on a combination of voluntary spirit with professional knowledge).

- Regular networking meetings that bring members together to share ideas, experiences, and lessons learned is critical to fostering and maintaining engagement in a participatory coalition.
- Having personnel on staff who are skilled at working with the media and who maintain an active, friendly, and extensive network with a range of electronic and print journalists and editors helps to ensure that a close linkage is established and maintained between advocacy and communication.
- When progress is stalled on one front, be prepared to approach the issue from another angle, at another level, or with a different person.
- Start major campaigns in one locality and support members to adapt or replicate it elsewhere.
- The motivation for the network must come from within. Let the network members understand or internalize the need to come together, rather than feeling pressured to do so by a donor.
- The network should be ‘informally formal.’ Decisions should be made based on consensus, and leadership should be rotated across different network members.
- Regular activities have to be conducted to give life to a network.
- On a regular basis (at least annually or bi-annually) it would be helpful to organize a national or

regional conference for network members. This would give them a venue within which they can share lessons, experiences, set-backs and approaches, can learn from each other, and can build greater solidarity. The social side of such gatherings is certainly not the least important!

- Networking is a process; it will not be immediate, automatic, or easy to ensure that different members collaborate in a positive way to achieve similar goals. Networking can thus be viewed as the first step for future collaboration among different organizations.
- Training must address not only what should be done, but also what should not. Many organizations will instinctively choose to become involved in aspects of tobacco control that are easiest or simplest. Use training and capacity building events to expose organizations to other, more effective types of activities.

## 5 Funding

Some network members may already have solid reputations with donors. Establishing a collaborative relationship with those members, and letting them guide donor relationships until the network itself is better established, can lead to enhanced funding opportunities. Such funding can in turn help the member organizations to grow institutionally, as they gain experience with managing donor funds. In some instances, as has happened in both Brazil and Bangladesh, donor funding to the larger network ultimately led to donor funding to smaller member organizations that would otherwise not have had access to international funding.

By being involved in a network, members collectively and individually have greater access to international funds for their tobacco control activities. Network members with more experience can assist other members to develop proposals; successful funding, in turn, increases the total amount of funded tobacco control work in the country.

To decrease reliance on external funding, networks can advocate the government to earmark funding for civil society within the national tobacco control program, or specifically as part of a dedicated tobacco tax. While this has been difficult to achieve in many instances, the potential for generous, sustained funding for tobacco control makes the effort worthwhile.

## 6 International and Regional Networks

In addition to local and national tobacco control networks, organizations may wish to join larger regional or international networks. An advantage of joining a larger network is that it provides ready access to global or regionally-specific experiences, lessons learned, best practices, materials, and expertise that could be adapted and used locally.

There are many advantages to face-to-face networking, and in the age of electronic communications it is important not to lose touch of the many opportunities that exist for direct contact. But networking need not be limited to those with whom you share a physical proximity: a local network can benefit greatly from some members' direct or indirect involvement in broader regional or international networks. Indeed, there are many advantages to being involved in a network that extends beyond single countries.

As the tobacco industry typically behaves in the same fashion in most countries, an advantage of larger, multi-country networks is that they can help newer organizations or networks, as well as older organizations/networks facing new issues, to prepare for what is likely to happen and to learn how activists in other countries have addressed the same problems. For example, the fact that British American Tobacco (BAT) released its corporate social responsibility report country-by-country enabled international tobacco control advocates to share their knowledge of the report and how to counter it. When advocates in one country wish to learn how to address the industry's claim that it reduces poverty by giving scholarships or

providing jobs, it is helpful to turn to international and regional networks to learn how advocates in other countries countered the claim. The actions of these advocates – including research on tobacco farmers in Sri Lanka, on bidi workers in India, on tobacco expenditures by the poor in Bangladesh, on national spending on tobacco in Cambodia, or on alternative livelihood possibilities in Viet Nam, for example – can then be adapted to other country contexts.

The **Framework Convention Alliance (FCA)**, created in 1999, represents the global voice of civil society in support of the FCTC. The FCA is comprised of nearly 350 organisations from more than 100 countries, each working on the ratification and implementation of the FCTC. Membership in the FCA is free and provides an opportunity to engage in policy discussions and networking through email list-servs, the website, and the online Bulletin newsletter. Many FCA members meet at official FCTC meetings or Conferences of the Parties (COPs).<sup>6</sup>

The WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) could never have taken shape without the contribution of individuals and organizations representing most of the world's countries. It was important at the time to counter the industry's claims that the treaty represented an attempt by rich countries to foist their policies on reluctant governments. Those who worked together on the treaty both contributed to international tobacco control and gained networking opportunities. With the

<sup>6</sup> For more information, see [http://fctc.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=2&Itemid=277](http://fctc.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=2&Itemid=277)

FCTC's passage and ratification, members of international and regional networks now help to develop, implement, and enforce national policies by sharing successes and failures between countries.

The **Southeast Asia Tobacco Control Alliance (SEATCA)** is a multi-sectoral alliance that supports countries in the region to develop and implement effective tobacco control policies. The alliance identifies regional tobacco control priorities and coordinates efforts on these priorities across its member countries. SEATCA promotes and facilitates knowledge sharing through an online resource centre and regional workshops. SEATCA's network combines representation from the region's NGOs, researchers and governments. By working with multi-sectoral, local partners, the alliance identifies and creates opportunities for effective campaigns and interventions.<sup>7</sup>

As tobacco control became an increasing priority in Africa, and as resources became available to address tobacco-related issues, tobacco control advocates quickly recognized the strength and value of working through regional networks. There were, however, few experienced tobacco control advocates in each country. By working together through networks such as the African Tobacco Control Alliance (ATCA), the Africa Tobacco Control Regional Initiative (ATCRI), the Tobacco Observatory in Francophone Africa (OTAF), and the Centre for Tobacco Control in Africa (CTCA), these advocates have been better positioned to work collaboratively across country borders, sharing experiences, expertise, and lessons learned.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> For more information, see [www.seatca.org](http://www.seatca.org)

<sup>8</sup> For more information about the African networks, see [www.atca-africa.org](http://www.atca-africa.org), [www.atcri.org](http://www.atcri.org), and [www.ctc-africa.org](http://www.ctc-africa.org).

Addressing the relationships between tobacco and poverty is becoming increasingly important. Engaging organizations that focus on poverty and development is crucial to getting tobacco control on the development agenda, and it is thus prudent to share successful national and regional approaches to engaging these non-tobacco control organizations. The larger development organizations typically operate in many countries, and successful collaboration initiatives in one country could potentially be replicated more broadly. For instance, if a large development organization could be convinced to address tobacco and poverty in one country, that achievement could be shared with colleagues in other countries, who could then approach that organization's office locally to see if they are interested in replicating the work.

*The **FCA** promotes tobacco control as a development intervention, using global campaigns to country-level advocacy. Its advocacy materials, real-life stories from members, and news on how to explain the issue of tobacco use as a development challenge can be found on FCA's website under Campaigns-FCTC: Action Now! ).*

***SEATCA** has produced a booklet and video case study to complement a series of regionally-based tobacco and poverty research studies that it supported on tobacco and poverty. Information about the case study and research studies are available on its website.*

Important as mentorship opportunities are locally, they can also work effectively at the regional and international levels. The greatest obstacle here can be

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OTAF does not currently have a website.

language, which is why regional groupings based on a common or similar language often prove to be the most successful, e.g. groups uniting Anglophone Africa, francophone Africa, Latin America, or (more complicated) Southeast Asia. International networks can also generate and facilitate mentoring, the provision of technical expertise, and access to funding opportunities or sources that might otherwise be unavailable to local organizations.

*The **Canadian Global Tobacco Control Forum** (the Forum) is a collaboration of leading Canadian organizations involved in domestic tobacco control and in international public health. While each member agency works within its own domestic and international networks, coming together also creates a much larger, inter-connected network. This facilitates the coordination of global tobacco control efforts and connects Canadians capable of providing technical assistance with international colleagues who seek support, guidance, or best practices. Since 2003, Forum members have individually and collectively managed projects to support the global implementation of the Framework Convention.*

*Part of **SEATCA**'s success is because it is based in Thailand, which is a regional and international leader in tobacco control. The network model allows Thailand to share its experiences and successes with others in the region.*

Thus when thinking about networking, it is important to utilize the opportunities provided by local, regional, and international networks. Depending on one's level of involvement, the time commitment need not be enormous, but the benefits of greater opportunities for sharing and learning can be tremendous.

## 7 Conclusions

Starting a network is easy; maintaining an active, involved, effective and successful network is not. Various challenges will typically arise, including jealousy, competition, problems securing funding, and dropout of members. It may be difficult to agree on the goals and objectives of the network and how to divide both responsibilities and resources.

On the other hand, a successful network can achieve vastly more than any single organization or handful of organizations working alone. Thus while it may be difficult, it is well worth the effort to invest in building a successful network. In addition, for tobacco control to remain a vibrant field, new organizations must regularly be recruited, trained, and mentored until they can work effectively with little or no support. Building the capacity of organizations throughout the country to act concertedly and without always seeking outside help is also the only way to ensure not only that national coverage is achieved, but that activities, messages, and approaches are appropriate to the local context. Networking is vital to the tobacco control movement. Despite the challenges, then, there are many positive sides to networking: strength in numbers, greater creativity, and improved access to a variety of skills and contacts.

Successful networks typically share a number of common traits. These include:

- A democratic decision-making approach that relies on the consensus of key coalition members for strategic decisions (such as which issues are

priorities), but which keeps all members sufficiently involved that their interest is retained.

- Gaining the support of a strong existing organization, especially one that has access to funds, until the network ‘gets on its own feet.’
- Treating the network as an informal platform, rather than expecting groups to work together in close partnership, which can be exceedingly difficult.
- Nurturing individual organizations, including small ones, to build their capacity and ensure organizational growth, so that they can gradually shape and manage local anti-tobacco activities. This also involves treating different organizations and individuals with respect regardless of their size, background, and prestige.
- Utilizing a committee-approach to give an opportunity to more people to take an active role rather than keeping all the power in the hands of a single individual or small group.
- Rotating the Chair at meetings to let many people have the chance to take (and learn how to take) a leadership role, while ensuring that decisions involve the voice of many parties.

There is no single approach to guarantee success, but a basic understanding of good approaches and common pitfalls will help improve the chance of being effective.



*From a virtual network that actively engaged only a few organizations, **ACT's** membership in Brazil now stands at more than 300. a wide cross-section of sectoral organizations, including the feminist movement and the environmental movement, have incorporated tobacco control into their agendas. ACT's members approach tobacco control from different angles, each according to its area of expertise. This has helped to raise the profile of tobacco control as a multi-sectoral issue, and has contributed to successful advocacy for the passage of smoke-free legislation in many states and municipalities in Brazil. Through its positive relationships with several government agencies, ACT has solidified its reputation as a trusted civil society partner: it sits on a number of state and municipal committees that address tobacco control, thereby ensuring that the voice of civil society is heard. The government, the media, and the public also recognize it as a credible and reliable source of information. This allows the network to influence government agencies and to coordinate activities throughout the country.*

Starting and maintaining a network can be demanding on an organization's time, money, and energy. However, the efforts are usually well worth it, given the exponentially increased reach, capacity, expertise, and amount of work that operating through a network provides. Those working in tobacco control have a responsibility to build the capacity of newcomers to the field, and networks can facilitate the task of recruiting, training, and mentoring. To be successful in our work, the advantages of networking are essential; it is thus well worth the effort of learning from the experiences of others about how to build and maintain strong, vibrant, successful networks.