

The Observatory of Tobacco Industry Strategies: a new perspective for monitoring the industry's interference in tobacco control policies in Brazil and the world

Observatório sobre as Estratégias da Indústria do Tabaco: uma nova perspectiva para o monitoramento da interferência da indústria nas políticas de controle do tabaco no Brasil e no mundo

Observatorio sobre las Estrategias de la Industria del Tabaco: una nueva perspectiva para el monitoreo de la injerencia de la industria en las políticas de control del tabaco en Brasil y en el mundo

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In order to stop the tobacco epidemic, the World Health Organization (WHO) has encouraged its member-States to become legally-bound Parties to the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO-FCTC), the first international treaty on health negotiated under the auspices of the WHO ¹, and which has been force since 2005. As of 2016, 179 countries and the European Union are Parties to this treaty ². In order to evaluate and define WHO-FCTC guidelines, every two years, member-States gather in the Conference of the Parties (COP) and establish recommendations on best practices for treaty implementation.

Brazil ratified the treaty in 2006 (*Decree 5,658/2006*) ³ and, in doing so, tobacco control became a State policy. Brazil was a pioneer in implementing several policies, such as: promoting smoking-free environments, offering smoking cessation treatments in the public health system – Brazilian Unified National Health System (SUS), restricting advertising, regulating tobacco product components, carrying out research on the prevalence of tobacco use and, more recently, launching a policy to increase taxes and prices of tobacco products. In order to implement WHO-FCTC recommendations, the National Commission for Implementing the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (CONICQ, in Portuguese) was created in 2003. Presided by the Health Minister, the CONICQ was initially composed of representatives of 11 ministries and is currently composed of representatives of 18 federal agencies ⁴.

According to the WHO's report on the CONICQ's progress ⁵, one of the biggest obstacles to implementing the policies established in the WHO-FCTC has been the tobacco industry's interference in public policy. Article 5.3 of the WHO-FCTC establishes the need for protecting public policy from the tobacco industry's commercial interests, in accordance with national law ¹. Guidelines for implementing Article 5.3 highlight the importance of monitoring the tobacco industry's activities, something that is also highlighted as crucial to tobacco control in the World Health Assembly's decision 54.18, which states that member-States must be alert to the tobacco industry's attempts at interference (<http://www.who.int/tobacco/resources/publications/Tobacco%20Industry%20Interference-FINAL.pdf>).

Though the need to combat tobacco industry strategies for impeding tobacco control was already present in the WHO-FCTC from its conception, the strategies for governments to defend themselves against the industry have developed gradually. To that end, non-governmental organizations and governments have constantly, but not systematically, monitored and denounced industry tactics ⁶. During COP, especially COP6, in 2014, it was recommended that member-States intensify collaborative

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actions in order to contain the transnational tobacco industry's efforts. The WHO-FCTC secretariat, backed by member-States, identifies the need to create centers for monitoring the tobacco industry or observatories for analyzing and publicizing current and future tobacco industry strategies so as to inform governments and policymakers and prevent industry interference ^{7,8,9,10,11}.

One such initiative is the website Tobacco Tactics (<http://www.tobaccotactics.org>), created by the University of Bath (UK) in 2012 in order to demonstrate how the tobacco industry acts to compromise tobacco control actions in the United Kingdom and the European Union. It also includes some global activities.

Through contacts with researchers from the University of Bath, and partnering with CONICQ, the Alliance for the Control of Tobacco (ACT), the Pan-American Health Organization (PAHO) and the International Union Against Tuberculosis and Lung Disease (UNION), the Oswaldo Cruz Foundation (Fiocruz) launched, in March 2016, the Observatory of Tobacco Industry Strategies. The Observatory is part of a global project promoted by the WHO-FCTC Secretariat to establish an international platform that acts as a sentinel for tobacco industry activities. This is the first Observatory established in a public research institution and it seeks to monitor, analyze and publicize tobacco industry activities and their impacts in Brazil. Another part of its mission is to provide strategic subsidies to the Brazilian National Tobacco Control Policy ⁸. This on-line platform was created based on the free-software wiki model, the same used by the Tobacco Tactics website (<http://www.tobaccotactics.org>).

The WHO-FCTC Secretariat initiated a process to broaden the creation of tobacco industry monitoring centers in BRICS countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa). These countries are home to more than 40% of the world population and, despite WHO-FCTC implementation efforts, they are countries where the tobacco industry is present and strongly active in attempts to compromise tobacco control measures ⁷. It is expected that centers consider each country's specificities and, at the same time, generate evidence-based results and data.

Observatories are document repositories that, simultaneously, have a dynamic process for communicating and divulging tobacco industry strategies. Based on WHO categories ^{9,11}, the Fiocruz Observatory is organized according to tobacco industry tactics to oppose tobacco control policies, that is, they are didactically organized in six categories: (1) tobacco companies' maneuvers to appropriate political and legislative processes; (2) overestimating the tobacco industry's importance to countries' economic development; (3) manipulating the public opinion to gain respectability; (4) creating front groups to defend industry interests; (5) disparaging scientific research with the purpose of weakening tobacco control legislation; (6) intimidating governments through litigation or threat of litigation. It also has a section with names of organizations and individuals connected, whether directly or indirectly, with the tobacco industry, such as front companies used to defend its interests, advertisement agencies, public relations companies, pro-tobacco unions and associations and individuals such as activists, lobbyists, politicians and bloggers who are pro-tobacco (Figure 1).

The information that makes up the Observatory comes from public sources, available in books, scientific articles, audiovisual files (photos, films, documentaries, advertisements), legal documents, theses, dissertations and other documents available in websites such as those belonging to tobacco companies and groups defending their interests. Internal tobacco industry documents, made publicly available as a result of legal settlements between governments and the industry, are also used (<https://industrydocuments.library.ucsf.edu/tobacco/>).

The Observatory will bring together, in a didactic fashion, diverse documents which show how the tobacco industry has attempted to prevent the adoption of measures to implement the WHO-FCTC. It will work alongside Brazilian National Cancer Institute José Alencar Gomes da Silva's (INCA) National Tobacco Control Policy Observatory (Figure 2).

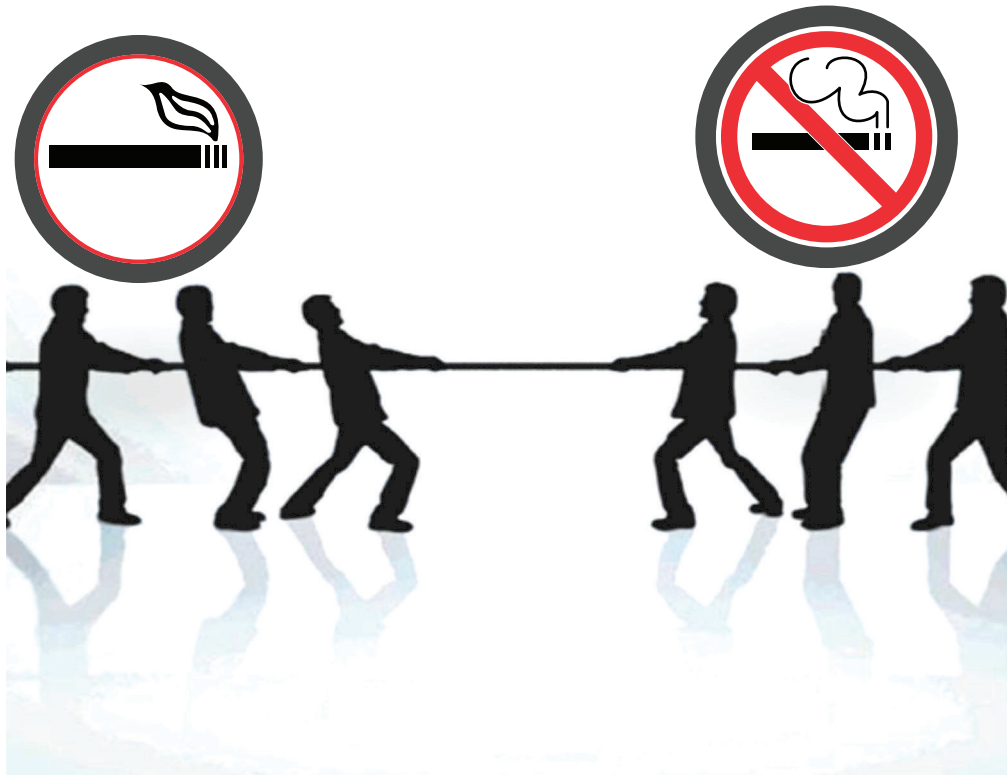
In the medium-term, this platform will favor the creation of a specific line of investigation for students, investigative reporters and other social actors interested in developing research on tobacco industry tactics, in order to better understand what these strategies are and how they undermine public policy, as well as how to contest them.

In the long term, the Observatory will consolidate a model that may be useful in monitoring the actions of other industries, such as the ultraprocessed foods industry, the soft drinks industry and the alcohol industry, since there is an undeniable similarity between these industries' practices. This will

Figure 1

Tactics used by the tobacco industry in response to challenges by the Observatory of Tobacco Industry Strategies Center for Studies on Tobacco and Health, Oswaldo Cruz Foundation, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

<p>The tobacco industry:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Exaggerates its economic importance; Manipulates the public opinion to gain respectability; Fabricates support through front groups; Disparages proven scientific research; Intimidates governments through litigation or threat of litigation; Attempts to capture political and legislative processes; <p>The Observatory of Tobacco Industry Strategies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Catalogs, indexes and analyzes documents concerning the tobacco industry's strategies; Makes recommendations for the CONICQ; Contributes to the protection of control policies; Shows that the tobacco industry acts in the same manner in all countries; and Gathers and divulges documents on the direct or indirect relationship between individuals and organizations and the tobacco industry.



CONICQ: National Commission for Implementing the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control.

Figure 2

The tobacco industry uses similar strategies in different countries.



Anvisa: Brazilian Health Regulatory Agency; EU: European Union.

favor actions to reduce Chronic Noncommunicable Diseases. In addition to being a model for other BRICS countries, the Fiocruz Observatory may serve as an example for all countries where this industry is active, considering its modus operandi is the same in all of these countries.

Dr. Margaret Chan, the WHO's Director-General, in her address at the 15th World Conference on Tobacco or Health, in 2012, declared that *"the enemy, the tobacco industry, has changed its face and its tactics. The wolf is no longer in sheep's clothing and it has bared its teeth"* (speech by Dra. Margareth Chan in the 15th World Conference on Tabacco or Health 2012, in Singapore. http://actbr.org.br/uploads/conteudo/703_Discurso_Margaret_chan.pdf, accessed on 26/Mar/2013), calling us to reflect on how countries, informed by the systematic monitoring of the tobacco industry, may work together in order to contain its influence.

Contributors

S. R. B. Turci contributed to the study's formulation, analysis and discussion. A. Medeiros contributed to the literature review. D. C. S. Carvalho contributed to the literature review. T. M. Cavalcante, S. A. Bialous and P. Jonhs contributed to the discussion. V. L. Costa e Silva contributed to analysis and conclusion. All authors revised and approved the final version of the text.

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The journal has been informed about one error in the paper. The correction is follows:

Where it reads:

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