

Appendix 10.1: Community Action through Faith Leaders in Cambodia

This case study was drawn from "Tobacco Control in Asia-Pacific: Context, Culture, Consequences," a presentation given at the National Conference on Tobacco or Health, 2005, by Steve Tamplin, Annette David, Burke Fishburn, Harley Stanton, Greg Hallen, Max de Courten and Jonathan Santos, Tobacco Free Initiative, WHO Western Pacific Region.

In Cambodia, Buddhist leaders might have seemed unlikely candidates to become tobacco control champions. Smoking prevalence among monks was high (approximately 35 percent), and tobacco was a popular offering to monks. Furthermore, Hun Sen, who controlled the political leadership, was a well-known chain smoker.

With more than 3,820 wats (temples) and approximately 55,000 monks, the monks were a suitable target audience in their own right. In addition, many young men in the community studied in wats and, although most did not become monks, their education and behavior were largely influenced by their time in the wat. Furthermore, approximately 95 percent of Cambodians are Buddhist and look to the monks in their communities for guidance and spiritual direction.

The Adventist Development and Relief Agency, an international non-governmental organization, initiated the Smoke-free Monks/Smoke-free Wats project with technical assistance from the World Health Organization Cambodia. The project targeted chief monks in each of the 22 provinces. Two monks who had informal political influence in the country gave the project their full and vocal support, which was critical in moving the project forward. The project focused on establishing smoke-free policies in wats, especially in large wats that serve as teaching hubs. Several wats became completely smoke-free within a relatively short span of time.

In addition, the monks became effective messengers for spreading tobacco control messages to the community and to other Buddhist countries within the region. One message that the head monks communicated was the inappropriateness of tobacco as an offering to monks. Another was the contradiction of tobacco use with Buddhist teachings of bodily purity. Annual conferences involving head monks from all over Cambodia and neighboring countries provided opportunities to clarify interpretation of the Buddhist scripts with respect to tobacco use and to make unified public declarations on the issue.

In addition, leading monks and those who preached on TV and radio presented messages via mainstream local media. The monks' messages were amplified by international media, which became highly interested in the Smoke-free Monks project.

The change engendered by the project was a measurable one. Smoking rates among monks declined significantly between 2001 and 2004 in all major regions of Cambodia. See the following pages for detailed results of this project.

Figure 22a. Prevalence of smoking in SFBM 2001 community survey shown by province and gender.

	Province (un-weighted)					Total	Total
	Phnom Penh	Puosat	Kampot	Svay Rieng	Siem Reap	Un-weighted	Weighted by province
Men	34.8% (n=48)	55.6% (n=50)	65.4% (n=85)	60.3% (n=105)	64.4% (n=112)	56.7% (n=400)	53.24
Total men	138	90	130	174	174	706	
Women	10.3% (n=18)	6.5% (n=14)	7.8% (n=15)	2.4% (n=3)	7.6% (n=10)	7.2% (n=60)	7.57
Total Women	174	216	192	124	132	838	
Total n	312	306	322	298	306	1544	

Figure 22b. Prevalence of smoking in SFCC 2004 community survey shown by province and gender. This Survey used husband-reported values for women smoking.

	Province (un-weighted)					Total	Total
	Phnom Penh	Puosat	Kampot	Svay Rieng	Siem Reap	Un-weighted	Weighted by province
Men	25.9%	56.0%	52.0%	44.6%	54.3%	47.8%	43.32
n	106	334	306	260	283	1,289	
Total men	409	521	588	583	521	2,697	
Women	2.48	5.05	3.11	2.27	7.32	4.04	3.96
n	10	29	18	13	36	106	
Total women	404	574	579	572	492	2,621	

In addition, attitudes toward smoking and cigarette advertising changed in the general population. The data confirm the effectiveness of monks as tobacco control champions in Cambodia.

