

Tobacco Harm Reduction scholarship

Appendix 3 – Interim reporting template – due by November 30th 2020

Scholars Name. RAWAL ARIF

Project Title. “Setting up foundation for bringing forth positive image of THR by neutralising negative campaign by WHO and BI partners in Pakistan.”
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Interim Report

Please expand boxes as necessary

A) Progress to date

In no more than 500 words please describe the progress that you have made against the agreed aims and objectives of the project.

To achieve aims and objectives of the Project, the guidelines provided by KAC were followed.

Induction:

I participated in the two-day online conference, Global Forum on Nicotine, held on 11 and 12 June, 2020 as part of the online induction program. The presentations and discussions assisted me in developing my understanding of the challenges and possible solutions to the ongoing debates around THR especially in countries like Pakistan.

Educational activities:

With respect to online educational activities and mentoring, I have attended a number of online conferences and watched videos disseminated by KAC. I have followed and read the reports and blogs on Foundation for Smoke-Free World’s (FSFW) and read with interest FSFW’s rebuttal to WHO papers on use of harm reduction products. I have also participated in online conference by Union to learn what they are talking about THR initiative. I have gone through online reading material and reports on the subject that included INNCO’s response to the Union’s position and statement on E-Cigs and reports developed by Alternative Research Initiative (ARI) in Pakistan to assess the national perspective. I benefitted from educational resources provided by KAC and THR Academy videos for gaining knowledge on THR.

Progress on Project’s activities:

1- Mapping Report: under the project a mapping report is to be developed presenting prevailing THR's initiative situation as well as understanding social dynamics with respect to tobacco use and vaping in Pakistan.

The mapping report is in progress. So far, I have interviewed a number of medical practitioners and users and sellers of e-cigarettes. Generally, it is found that there are a number of e-cigarettes shops operating in twin cities of Islamabad and Rawalpindi without any restriction. The shopkeepers have adequate knowledge regarding use of e-cigarettes, different brands and accessories. The government of Pakistan is allowing import, sale and purchase of THR products under 'consumer goods' rules. However, the government has levied 100 percent duty on e-cigarettes in current national budget which has doubled the prices of vaping material.

Physicians in hospitals and private medical practitioners have different opinions regarding vaping. Some consider it injurious to health whereas others view vaping as less harmful and can be adopted to quit smoking. This is consistent with polls conducted globally where medical professionals still think that nicotine causes cancer. The users of e-cigarettes find it better alternate from conventional cigarettes and ultimately to quit smoking. Some vapers even claimed vaping has improved their health.

The Union has increased its activities against THR under its program named "STOP" and the Bloomberg Initiative's partners are keenly watching the growth of THR products in Pakistan. They are also approaching media filing stories against vaping.

2- Production of eight visual evidences:

So far, we have produced three short videos comprising opinions of doctors, sellers and users of e-cigarettes. The videos are uploaded on www.rawalscholar.com website. Two fact sheets will be produced before end of the project.

3- Media monitoring

Media in Pakistan publish stories occasionally on activities of tobacco control advocates. Some stories challenge interference of tobacco industry in government's policy matters. Recently, stories are appearing in favor of vaping but not often. A selection of important news items is attached with this report.

4- Website

A website www.rawalscholar.com is developed and videos and other material is uploaded.

B) What problems or unanticipated issues have you encountered. What action did you take to overcome them? Will they affect your ability to complete the project and complete it on time?

(300 words Maximum)

The issues and challenges were already anticipated as BI partners are actively propagating against THR products. The physicians largely are not supporting the idea of switching over to vaping to quit smoking. But, in spite of that opposition, the number of vapers is increasing.

However, doctors, sellers and users were reluctant to give interview and answer the questions in detail as they apprehend their talk might be distorted and videos might be misused. It was somehow difficult to create trust among the interviewees.

C) Are there any changes you would wish to make to the aims, objectives or scope of the project? (Changes must be agreed in writing with KAC)

(300 words maximum)

No changes are required at this point

D) What learning has emerged from your project?

(300 words)

THR is a potential source for smokers to either quit the habit or to continue enjoying nicotine in a safe manner. The concept of harm reduction is not new as we use the same concept in our daily lives when we reduce harm by using seat belts, helmets when riding a bike and more importantly its use in programs for HIV-AIDS by using condoms. Harm reduction for tobacco use is a new concept still not fully understood by all stakeholders and the task is even more challenging with tobacco control donors taking a hard line on this.

Please also attach project expenditure to date, using the budget template