

For immediate release

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## **PRESS RELEASE: “THE CHALLENGE OF TOBACCO CONTROL IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA – THE WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION FRAMEWORK CONVENTION”**

The Secretariat of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO FCTC) and the United Nations Development Programme have recently released a report on the state of tobacco control governance in Sub-Saharan Africa. The report examines developments in the region to create institutional mechanisms to implement the provisions of FCTC. The report identifies challenges and opportunities faced by governments to establish focal points and national coordinating mechanisms to coordinate tobacco control policy across different sectors such as finance and agriculture. McGill School of Physical and Occupational Therapy (SPOT) Assistant Professor, Dr. Raphael Lencucha was one of the lead authors on the report. Dr. Lencucha drew from his experience researching whole-of-government approaches to chronic disease prevention to contribute to the project.

According to the WHO, tobacco-related illness is one of the world's biggest public health threats, with almost 6 million people dying each year from tobacco linked diseases. With this number on the rise, the WHO highlights that up to 80% of these deaths occur in low and middle income countries, like those found in Sub-Saharan areas.

In 2005, the WHO FCTC was ratified in an effort to strengthen and harmonize countries' tobacco control legislation under a global framework. There are currently 180 signatories to the Convention, with 44 from Sub-Saharan Africa. Members of the Convention are obliged to take tobacco controlling steps over time, to help reduce the demand and supply for tobacco products (through taxation, media control, warning labels, etc).

This latest report acknowledges the struggles that governments face when attempting to implement and regulate tobacco control measures at the national level, and it aims to provide 'practical recommendations for policymakers.' According to the report, Sub-Saharan Africa is at a 'crossroads' in tobacco control, as it is currently in the early stages of the tobacco epidemic – where use is rising dramatically and the tobacco industry is pushing aggressively to expand markets. This situation provides an opportunity to coordinate policy development within government (such as increasing tobacco taxes, banning sales to minors, and putting health warnings on packaging) in order to help slow the epidemic and improve health in the region.

Dr. Lencucha's current research also examines public policymaking in complex institutional contexts. This research is guided by overarching interest in the relationship between norms, economic and political interests and evidence in the policymaking process.

More information and the original report can be found at: <http://goo.gl/4uePY3>.

More information on current SPOT research can be found at: [www.mcgill.ca/spot/research](http://www.mcgill.ca/spot/research)