

2.5 International Tobacco Evidence Network (ITEN), University of Illinois at Chicago

Background¹

The International Tobacco Evidence Network (ITEN) aims “...to maintain a formal network of economists, epidemiologists, social scientists, and other tobacco control experts able to provide rapid, policy-relevant research on country-level, regional or international tobacco control issues.”ⁱ ITEN’s mission is to facilitate communication between researchers and tobacco control experts; to promote cooperation in order to strengthen the capacity to manage research; to disseminate existing research-based knowledge, and monitor tobacco control research activities with an international aspect; and finally, to encourage colleagues in low and middle-income countries to undertake interdisciplinary analyses of tobacco, to provide them with both technical and strategic advice, and to help them identify research priorities.”ⁱⁱ ITEN has established regional collaborative partnerships with organisations in Mexico, Poland, Southeast Asia, and South Africa.

ITEN focuses its priorities on the economics of tobacco. Nine priorities are identifiedⁱⁱⁱ:

- To estimate the effect of prices and taxes on the demand for tobacco products;
- To examine the effect of economic incentives on smoking initiation and cessation.
- To estimate the impact of other factors on the demand for tobacco products, including advertising and promotion, socio-economic and demographic factors, health information;
- To examine issues related to the globalisation of the tobacco industry, trade liberalisation, and privatization;
- To study the impact of tobacco control policies on employment in tobacco farming, manufacturing, wholesaling, retailing and in other sectors;
- To estimate the health care and social costs of tobacco use;
- To examine equity issues related to tobacco use and tobacco control;
- To describe the impact of tobacco use on household expenditure patterns; and
- To examine issues related to smuggling of tobacco products.

Tobacco Control Research Information

The following information has been compiled through the administering of a questionnaire as well as an interview.²

Tobacco Control Research Mandate

ITEN does not fund research except for small, occasional seed funding to its partners in collaborating centers. Its primary focus is on technical support to tobacco research. Its mission is outlined above.

¹ From website <http://www.tobaccoevidence.net>

² Questionnaire and Interview: Samantha Bowers, Project Coordinator ITEN

Tobacco Control Research Priorities

ITEN's priorities are centred on building capacity in developing countries by providing local researchers with training and tools for tobacco control research. The capacity building consists of three major steps: 1) identify researcher; 2) provide training and mentoring; 3) assist these researchers in locating funding for work. Researchers are expected to have experience in economic or public health research.

ITEN also helps to identify research gaps that are addressed in long-term research plans, but is it can also quickly mobilize resources in order to provide rapid response to new market developments, and to emerging research opportunities.

General Information

Tobacco Control Research: ITEN is mandated to support tobacco control research through networking researchers in developing countries with international experts.

Partners: ITEN is funded by the Rockefeller Foundation (primary funder) and CDC.

Geographic Focus: Southeast Asia, South Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, Central and Eastern Europe

Total Budget for Tobacco Control Research: Annually: \$400,000 USD

Only very small part of the budget is used for providing funding in the form of small seed grants to researchers. Further, funding to ITEN is project specific; ITEN seeks individual funders for each project.

Average Funding per Project: NA

Staffing: The core group of five ITEN members represents the ITEN Secretariat. Technical experts and other ITEN collaborators are hired for specific tasks; regional researchers are supported through direct ITEN grants or through grants attached to ITEN activities.

Key Initiatives

Southeast Asia Project: The objective is to identify local researchers experienced in economics or public health and pair them with a mentor with experience in tobacco control research. The first important meeting of researchers was in March 2002. ITEN provided training at a regional workshop after which researchers wrote preliminary proposals. ITEN mentors then worked with the individual researchers to strengthen their proposals. Proposals were then submitted to the Rockefeller Foundation after ITEN reviewers evaluated them. Research will commence when proposals are accepted. The proposals are based on a one-year timeframe.

As this is ITEN's first major project, it is expected that this will become the model for future work.

Network: Researchers involved in ITEN projects automatically become part of the existing network of researchers. This network includes experts in various topic areas within tobacco control.

Capacity Building

The focus of ITEN's work is capacity building. It helps to train beginning investigators through special training programs and workshops on tobacco control issues. ITEN mentoring provides continual support to researchers in developing, implementing and disseminating their research.

The ultimate hope is that the capacity building provided by ITEN will establish a strong, capable research community in several developing countries.

Knowledge Transfer

ITEN is actively involved in identifying talented researchers interested in tobacco control research. The ITEN website serves as an important vehicle in knowledge dissemination. It also informs researchers about the work of ITEN and the opportunities it provides.

Dissemination of research results occurs primarily through the website. In addition, researchers are encouraged to attend international conferences and to teach at local workshops. Further, ITEN provides a peer review for papers written by researchers. The peer review process will increase the likelihood of publication in scientific journals.

ITEN Researchers Forum on the web presents research findings and helps researchers to network. It is hoped that the peer review process will be structured into the Researchers Forum website as well.

Policy Relevance: Research is expected to have public policy relevance and to be translated into public policy recommendations.

Evaluation

ITEN is subject to evaluation through grant reporting process to its funders (currently CDC and the Rockefeller Foundation). Monitoring is done on regular basis obtaining feedback from country coordinators, individual researchers and cooperating mentors.

Funding Mechanisms

Restrictions

Limited seed funding is provided to individual researchers and/or organizations in developing countries.

Selection

Grant selection is based on sound methodology of the research proposal and its policy relevance.

ITEN technical experts review research proposals.

An institution can become an ITEN collaborating centre or establish a regional partnership with ITEN through collaboration on a joint research project.

Challenges and Opportunities for Research

Two challenges were identified:

- Identifying talented researchers and regional collaborating centers .
- Securing funding for ITEN core activities .

Global Agenda for Tobacco Control Research

ITEN used the Agenda in the development of its tobacco control priorities. ITEN made the following comments regarding its work in relation to the Global Agenda for Tobacco Control Research:

Global Agenda for Tobacco Control Research	
Research Priorities	Comments from Organisation
1. Country Specific Research	The research supported by ITEN is country specific.
2. Policy Interventions (Legislative and Economic)	ITEN focuses on research that informs policy interventions.
3. Programme Interventions	ITEN evaluates economic impact of these interventions.
4. Treatment of Tobacco Dependence	ITEN supports research on economic impact and efficiency of the treatment.
5. Tobacco Product Design and Regulation	ITEN supports research examining behavioural impact of Tobacco Product Design and Regulation.
6. Tobacco Industry Analysis	ITEN focuses on the effect of privatization and industry advertising/promotional activities.
7. Tobacco Farming	ITEN researchers examine economic impact of tobacco control on employment.
8. Framework Convention on Tobacco Control	ITEN supports research on tobacco smuggling and other tax related issues.
Cross-cutting Themes	Comments from Organisation
A. High Risk Populations	ITEN focuses on issues of poverty and tobacco use, youth smoking, tobacco consumption among women in developing countries.
B. Country Readiness	ITEN helps to build capacity in low- and middle-income countries.
C. Dissemination	The ITEN website is the primary tool in research dissemination.

D. Capacity Development	This is the foundation of ITEN's work. Researchers are provided training, mentoring and support in acquiring funding for research proposals.
E. Mobilisation of Human and Financial Resources to Implement a Comprehensive Research Agenda	ITEN helps to identify research priorities and knowledge gaps.

ⁱ From: "About ITEN", ITEN website: <http://www.tobaccoevidence.net/aboutiten.html>

ⁱⁱ Ibid.

ⁱⁱⁱ From: "Research Priorities", ITEN website: http://www.tobaccoevidence.net/about_researchpriorities.html