

The Foundation for a Smoke-Free World after 2 years

- Prof. Jean-François ETTER, PhD
- E-cigarette Summit, London
- November 14, 2019

- I have no competing interests
- I am independent from FSFW
- The organiser of the E-cig Summit asked me to do this presentation

Methods

- Literature review
- FSFW website, including tax returns
- Telephone interviews with :
 - 2 grantees
 - 2 FSFW board members
 - 1 former collaborator
 - 1 tobacco control expert with no conflicts of interest
 - FSFW director: Derek Yach
- E-mail interviews with:
 - 5 tobacco control experts with no conflicts of interest (USA, UK, Canada)
 - 1 grantee
 - 1 FSFW board member

- I thank the colleagues who commented on preliminary versions of these slides

A decorative header featuring a horizontal line with a light green gradient. On the left, a large black bracket '[' is positioned. On the right, a large yellow bracket ']' is positioned. In the center, the text 'FOUNDATION FOR A SMOKE-FREE WORLD' is enclosed in pink brackets. The words 'FOUNDATION FOR A' are in blue, and 'SMOKE-FREE WORLD' is in green.

FOUNDATION FOR A SMOKE-FREE WORLD

- Launched in September 2017
- Funded by Philip Morris International (PMI), \$1 billion over 12 years
- Focus on **harm reduction**, new non-combustible tobacco products
- Compatible with PMI industrial strategy : product diversification
- FSFW allows PMI a charitable tax deduction

Objectives of FSFW

- According to Certificate of Incorporation, FSFW “Shall be operated exclusively **for charitable, scientific and educational** purposes”

Objectives, in Certificate of Incorporation (Delaware):

- “ To support **independent scientific research** free from the influence of any commercial entity ”
- “ To scrutinize (...) the **tobacco industry** ”
- “ **Research** the effect of reduced demand for leaf tobacco on **farmers** ”
- ...

How was FSFW received?

Reactions of tobacco control, public health, medical journals :

- Mostly negative

Media coverage : overwhelmingly negative

- The media presented FSFW **as not credible** because of the funding link to PMI
- Media reporting primarily framed by **doubt, skepticism, and disapproval.**
- The media say this is **disingenuous**: PMI should stop undermining anti-smoking laws

Watts C *et al.* [*JMIR*](#), 2019

- If FSFW is just a public relations operation, has it been successful to date ?

Is FSFW independent from PMI ?

- PMI provided initial funding
- The FSFW's purpose was decided after a **PMI-paid, privately negotiated** arrangement between Yach and PMI, with no external oversight
- The FSFW director :
 - was selected by PMI
 - was paid by PMI during the FSFW creation process
 - led the process of selecting the board of directors, and team

Does FSFW operate independently from PMI?

Interviews : board members and FSFW director say that...

- They did all they possibly could to be independent
- They welcome suggestions about what more they can do
- There is no interference from PMI with direction, or grant making
- FSFW operates independently

Observations :

- Whatever FSFW does, the perception of insufficient independence may never go away
- There is a **trade-off** between the need for independence and the need for oversight and accountability

Is FSFW's real goal to create doubt, divisions and undermine tobacco control ?

- Historical record of scientific misconduct from PMI
- PMI's scientific initiatives to undermine tobacco control :
Whitecoat Project, INBIFO
- Willingly or not, FSFW did create controversies and divisions

But ...

- The harassment that some FSFW grantees report by academics and tobacco control people may also create divisions
- Bias can be observed on both 'sides' of the tobacco harm reduction debate
- Scrutiny is continuously needed, as should be the case with all scientific activities and output

Transparency

- US law requires transparency about how the money is spent
=> tax returns + names of grantee organisations are published on FSFW website
- Much of the info I needed for this talk was not available on FSFW website e.g.
 - details on grants, names of grantees, grant attribution process,
 - decision making, board selection
 - output, monitoring and evaluation
 - the minutes of the board meetings are not published anymore
- The names of scientific advisory board members are not disclosed
 - Reason (from interviews): to protect them from harassment
 - Shouldn't these names be made public ?
- Interviews with board members : they say that all research will be published

Who are the directors ?

- In addition to D. Yach, only one of the directors has expertise on tobacco
- Other directors' background: Accounting, Law, New Technologies
- The scarcity of expertise on tobacco control and foundation management in board of directors is a weakness
- 4 board members left already

From interviews:

- New board members with tobacco control expertise will be added
- There are renowned tobacco control experts on the **scientific** advisory board (who?)

Compensation (from 2018 tax returns):

- Director: \$ 795'000
- Other directors : range from \$ 0 to \$ 88'000 for part-time (25%)
- 5 highest paid employees: median = \$ 344'000

How was the money spent in 2019 ?

Fiscal year 2019 :

- \$ 32 million **spent** on grants
- \$ 4 million on communication
- \$ 20 million on operating expenses

○ Source: FSFW

Why spend so much money on communication and operation ?

Communication agencies have links to tobacco industry (e.g. Ogilvy, McKinsey)

Based on high communication expenses (\$7 million in 2018), Legg *et al.* conclude that FSFW is mainly a public relations operation ([Lancet](#) 2019)

Interviews + [response](#) by Yach to Legg pointed that costs for staff and public relations are justified during the initial stage of setting up a large foundation

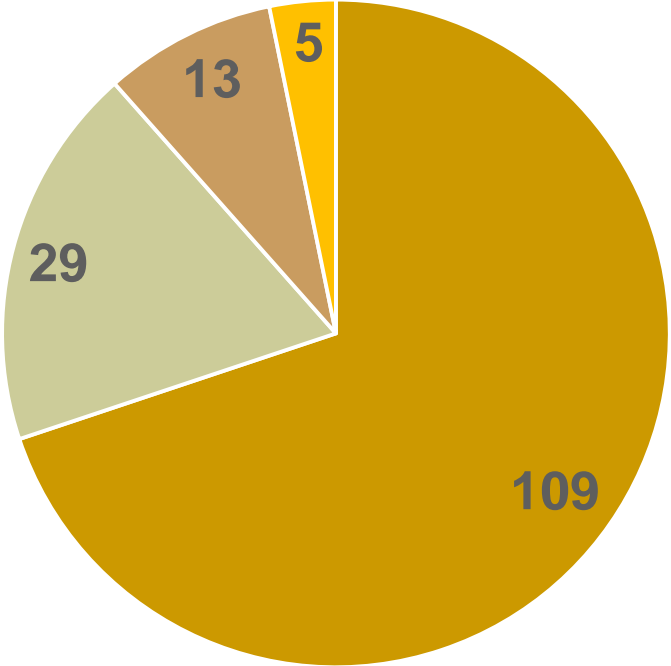
Grants approved since FSFW inception: \$156 million

From e-mail + interviews with board members + director :

- Acceptation rate for applications = 1 / 3
 - \$ 156 million **approved** for grants
 - 90 grants were approved
 - For 150 researchers
-
- Therefore, it appears that FSFW is functioning, vetting and approving grants

Grants approved since FSFW inception:
\$156 million

\$ million



- Health, Science, Tech
- Agriculture
- Industry
- Educ, Advocacy

Source: FSFW

Who are the grantees?

- Grantee organisations (not individuals) are listed on FSFW [tax returns](#) and [website](#), but there is not enough info on FSFW website
- Relatively few mainstream researchers applied
- FSFW has difficulty attracting experienced tobacco control researchers
- Many grantee organisations were not previously involved in tobacco control

Nevertheless...

- Several grantee organisations from low- and middle-income countries
- Perhaps new ideas + innovations may come from people outside the field ?

But inexperienced grantees...

- may have difficulty producing useful work
- may not understand the importance of independence from the tobacco industry

Countries listed by amount for approved grants

	<u>\$ million</u>	
■ USA	56.....	Largely for agricultural transformation in Malawi
■ Italy	30	
■ Malawi	29	
■ New Zealand	9.6	
■ UK	9.5	
■ Germany	2.9	
■ Also:		
		United Arab Emirates, Switzerland, Pakistan, Bangladesh, South Africa, Liberia, Maldives, Greece.

Grant attribution

Interviews with board members and director:

- The vetting process is described by them as :
 - operational, robust,
 - with multiple decision layers, and
 - thorough scrutiny of applications and applicants

But...

- The grant section of FSFW website is not sufficiently informative
- It is difficult to understand what the projects are + how they are selected

Interviews with 2 grantees :

- « There was no interference from FSFW in our work »
- « There was no attempt to influence our output »

Outputs to date

- It was difficult to track what was produced
- FSFW website does not list everything
- Several reports are available on FSFW + centres' websites (e.g. New Zealand)
- As expected, these reports are centered on harm reduction and nicotine products

But...

- It is too soon to judge FSFW's output

Ongoing projects

- Grantees and board members told me that many innovative projects are in the pipeline,
... but it is hard to know which ones exactly and to judge their quality
 - There are few other funding sources for tobacco harm reduction at this level, in particular in low- and middle-income countries
- e.g.
- Projects in Asia
 - Agricultural transformation
 - Engagement with tobacco Industry
 - Scholarships for students (tobacco harm reduction)

Challenges met by FSFW

Governance:

- Scarcity of expertise on tobacco control + foundation management in board of directors
- Who is the director accountable to, if the board selection is lead by the director ?
- Is power too concentrated in the hands of the director ?
- Value for money ? (e.g. \$ 24 M for operating + communic.)
- Turnover among board members: is it a warning signal ?

- Opposition from WHO and other organisations (e.g. Bloomberg) may limit FSFW's impact
- WHO FCTC advised member states not to collaborate with FSFW
- Negative press coverage

- Some inexperienced grantees

Harassment by academics + tobacco control

- Reported harassment by academics + tobacco control people of :
 - grantees,
 - scientific advisory board members,
 - even kids + teachers who participated in the Conrad Challenge (an innovation competition for students ages 13-18)
- One grantee said : « reactions were irritating rather than onslaught »
- Other grantees reported that they were ostracized, silenced, excluded
- Even harassment, bullying (Marewa Glover)
- This must alarm would-be grantees + would-be board members

Harassment of Marewa Glover

- She received a large FSFW grant to reduce smoking in indigenous people in NZ
And then...
- Researchers at Otago University tried to stop district health boards (DHB) working with Glover
- New Zealand Ministry of Health warned DHBs it prefers they not work with Glover
- Cyber-bullying, misinformation
- Defamatory remarks: Glover took legal action
- Opponents contacted KiwiBank to try and stop her becoming a finalist in the New Zealander of the Year competition (she was among 3 finalists but did not win)
- Glover says:
 - « They want to silence me »
 - « What happened was like a public lynching »
 - « A cascade of 'damages' has ensued »

Response of the scientific + tobacco control community to harassment

- Weak response
- Few denunciations of these unethical and unprofessional behaviors
- We should stand much more strongly against *ad personam* attacks and make it clear that they are not acceptable (anti-e-cig people were harassed too)
- Where will it end, if we allow this to continue ?
- Boycott, exclusion cannot produce positive results
- Harassment pushes FSFW to be less transparent about partners

Conclusions

- FSFW is operational, innovative projects are reportedly under way
- It is too soon to judge FSFW's output
- FSFW = different approach that relies on new technologies, agricultural transformation, engagement with industry
- Could this approach have value ?
- Existing tobacco control approaches
 - have limited impact in some countries or subgroups,
 - achieved change too slowly, an acceleration is needed
- FSFW's potential is undermined by WHO boycott, opposition from tobacco control, harassment, difficulty in collaborating with renowned scientists

Conclusions

- More transparency is needed on scientific board members, governance, grantees and projects, but this requires tougher condemnation of harassment
- Willingly or not, FSFW did create controversies and divisions (and bad press for PMI)
- Everybody is not convinced that FSFW is sufficiently independent from PMI
- Some concerns with governance
- Scrutiny needed on independence, transparency, governance and output (as for anyone else)