

5. CONCLUSION

Alcohol use in the SEAR Member States suggests multifarious challenges to policy-makers, professionals and civil societies. Growing evidence of harmful effects coupled with inadequate information on effective interventions creates a dilemma in public health. The divergent perspectives of stakeholders has added more to the existing confusion resulting in now-on-now-off public health policies.

The existence of a wide range of alcohol control policy options is clear. It is evident from research that measures are available that can significantly reduce alcohol-related problems and the resulting harm. However, there is clearly no single policy measure that is able to combat and reduce all alcohol-related problems. Rather, it is more effective to incorporate a range of measures in a comprehensive alcohol strategy. It is the policy 'mix' or finding the right balance that is the key in reducing the overall public health burden of alcohol consumption.

The goal of a comprehensive, effective and sustainable alcohol policy can only be attained by ensuring the active and committed involvement of all relevant stakeholders. Alcohol control strategies need a high degree of public awareness and support in order to be implemented successfully. Without sufficient popular support, enforcement and maintenance of any restriction is jeopardized, and resistance and circumvention are likely to develop. Multiple agencies, for example, the ministries of law, industry, revenue, agriculture, the customs and law enforcement departments, medical associations and NGOs, should lobby for clear formulation and effective implementation of a rational, integrated and comprehensive alcohol control policy.

The available estimates of harm from alcohol use are merely the tip of the iceberg. The seeming gain from the existing alcohol control policies i.e, the revenue from excise taxes ends up being spent to counter the adverse effects of alcohol use in the medium and long-term. Similarly short-term gains from bursts of economic development by establishing new breweries would end up with social mal-developments which coupled with inefficient administrative machinery, would lead to a situation best described by the proverbial statement "leaky faucet flooding the floor". *Hence the urgent need is to stop mopping the floor; adopt a comprehensive approach instead of a piece-meal strategy, and evolve long-term commitments for implementing a public health agenda for control of harm from alcohol use.*

It is evident from research that measures are available that can significantly reduce alcohol-related problems and the resulting harm.

The goal of a comprehensive, effective and sustainable alcohol policy can only be attained by ensuring the active and committed involvement of all relevant stakeholders.