

Finding an Intermediary Solution for Tobacco Control Regime

Prof. Dr. Drg. Achmad Syawqie, MS¹

UN/WHO has set the target to reduce tobacco consumption among adults by 30% in 2025, which results in continuous debates about "unrealistic vs. too modest" target of achievement. A number of measures have been taken and adopted by many countries to reduce cigarette consumption, such as FCTC (Framework Convention of Tobacco Control) and Smoke Free Generation. Unfortunately, the global cigarette consumption is still rising.

It is interesting to note that tobacco control principle often come as an extreme measure. This is arguably ineffective for at least three reasons. First, it will cut off public consultation about the danger of smoking itself through the absence of quality standard and consumer protection. Second, it may create regulatory hassle as the result of disproportionate penalties to offset missing tax revenue. And lastly, it may also create legal enforcement issues.

As technology develops rapidly, the recent public discourse on utilizing electronic devices which mimic the sensation of smoking as an intermediary solution comes as an interesting area to explore. A number of health-related studies have looked at what, if any, toxic substances are found in this newly introduced non-combustible nicotine delivery products. Overall it is pretty encouraging compared to regular cigarettes or other reduced risk products which have been introduced in the past. The vapor within non-combustible nicotine delivery products still contains formaldehyde and acetaldehyde but generally in much lower levels than regular cigarettes. In addition, the heated-not burn technology in these products also eliminates the formation of many potentially harmful chemical compounds that are produced at the high temperatures associated with combustion. These products also introduce a new alternative for smoking cessation effort especially to smokers who are looking forward to quit but are unable to undergo a dramatic change due to their addiction.

A study by the Boston University School of Public Health states that non-combustible nicotine delivery products are much safer than regular combustible cigarettes. "Although the existing research does not warrant a conclusion that these products are safe in absolute terms and further clinical studies are needed to comprehensively assess its safety, a preponderance of the available evidence shows them to be much safer than regular cigarettes and comparable in toxicity to conventional nicotine replacement products," the authors said. The report reviewed 16 laboratory studies that identified the components in various non-combustible nicotine delivery products. The authors found that carcinogen levels in these technologically advanced products are up to 1,000 times lower than in conventional cigarettes.