

A conversation with Kristina Sperkova, March 28, 2019

Participants

- Kristina Sperkova – President, IOGT International
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Note: These notes were compiled by GiveWell and give an overview of the major points made by Ms. Sperkova.

Summary

GiveWell spoke with Ms. Sperkova of IOGT International (IOGT) as part of its investigation into improving alcohol policy in low and middle-income countries (LMICs). Conversation topics included an overview of IOGT, its policy advocacy process, other organizations working on alcohol control, and room for more funding within alcohol control.

Overview of IOGT

IOGT is one of the largest organizations currently working on global alcohol policy. Its approach to alcohol control is comprehensive, and its activities are conducted continuously.

Organizational structure

IOGT is a global network comprised of 134 member organizations based in 56 countries. Organizations can apply either for associated or full membership, with full members receiving voting rights (e.g. electing International Board, deciding on strategic plan).

IOGT's network includes organizations that are member-based and mainly national or local. Many IOGT members considered to be national organizations are located in capital cities or other bigger cities and conduct activities near capitals rather than across an entire country.

The World Congress

Every four years, IOGT assembles the World Congress, a weeklong conference attended by all IOGT members that are able. Members either utilize internal funds to attend, or if internal funds are limited, the organizations (typically from LMICs) are supported by IOGT. The World Congress elects IOGT's International Board and decides its four-year strategic plan and policy programs (the latest ones were alcohol, tobacco, and narcotic drugs policy programs).

Team composition

IOGT's team is equivalent to approximately 3.3 full-time staff, consisting of:

- A full-time Director of Strategy & Advocacy
- A full-time Administration Officer

- A Communications Officer and Big Alcohol Exposed Campaign Manager, who work for a Sri Lankan member organization but together represent one full-time IOGT staff
- A visual communications staff located in Bosnia who spends 20% of their time working for IOGT
- A Financial Officer who works for a Swedish member organization but spends 5-10% of their time working for IOGT

The international president is paid a fee for a full-time job position and is highly involved in the administration and management of the organization.

Budget

IOGT's annual budget is approximately €200,000 and is composed of:

- **Membership fees** – Fees vary based on the size of a member organization as well as the income classification of the country in which it works. Fees for members located in high-income countries also differ based on whether the country is a member of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). For example, an organization from a low-income country would pay an annual fee of €25, whereas an organization from a high-income OECD country would pay an annual fee of €3 per member or €200 if it possessed less than 100 members. IOGT also does not exclude organizations from its network if they are unable to pay membership fees.
- **Donations from members** – Large member organizations from Sweden donate funds to IOGT.
- **Grants** – IOGT applies for short-term (6-18 months) grants from the EU and mainly Swedish donor institutions.

Core IOGT activities

Advocacy

IOGT's main role is to advocate for alcohol policies at the global level, typically by engaging with various UN agencies. It also supports members' advocacy work by coordinating efforts in different regions, providing analysis and recommendations, and translating scientific research into understandable advocacy tools.

Organizing meetings

IOGT organizes meetings for member organizations to communicate, build capacity, and exchange experiences. In the past five years, it has held international meetings at least once biennially. It also provides youth-based member organizations with opportunities to meet and interact in international alcohol-free environments at least once a year (typically twice).

Activities of member organizations

The larger IOGT member organizations—including IOGT Norway, IOGT-NTO Sweden, IOGT Germany, and IOGT Schweiz (a rather small Swiss organization)—are

interested mainly in building the capacity of civil society in LMICs to advocate for effective alcohol policies. These member organizations typically do not conduct in-country advocacy activities, instead granting funding to local groups. For example, IOGT Norway operates a development agency called FORUT, which supports regional alcohol policy alliances in Southern and Western Africa as well as other work in Sri Lanka and Nepal. IOGT-NTO Sweden supports development projects in East Africa, Southeast Asia, and the Balkans.

Coordination of activities

In order to optimize global advocacy efforts around alcohol policy, IOGT-NTO Sweden and IOGT Norway agree on the countries in which each organization plans to work based on previous experience and relationships with local organizations. IOGT International, IOGT Norway, IOGT-NTO Sweden, and IOGT Switzerland meet at least once a year in order to coordinate their work in LMICs.

Funding sources

The large IOGT member organizations involved with alcohol policy advocacy in LMICs, such as IOGT Norway and IOGT-NTO Sweden, receive funding from their respective governments. However, some member organizations do not receive any funding. For example, an associated member from Lithuania, which contributed to the adoption of alcohol policy measures in the country, relies entirely on volunteers (both professionals and enthusiasts).

Comparison between IOGT and the Global Alcohol Policy Alliance

The Global Alcohol Policy Alliance (GAPA) is one of the largest organizations working on alcohol policy, although it is different from IOGT in a few ways:

- **Leadership structure** – IOGT’s International Board and strategic plan is democratically voted on by member organizations, whereas GAPA’s board is self-selected and comprised largely of scientists, with some civil society representatives.
- **Core activities** – IOGT provides strategic direction for member organizations through global policy advocacy activities, and it is also involved in various other projects such as the 2019 Summer Leadership Academy for Alcohol Harm Prevention, regional seminars, and capacity building for youth. GAPA’s core activity is organizing the biennial Global Alcohol Policy Conference. It is also involved in various smaller advocacy activities such as speaking at side events of the annual World Health Assembly.

IOGT’s policy advocacy process

Global-level advocacy

The three main alcohol policies that IOGT advocates for are taxation of alcohol, regulation of alcohol availability, and bans on or limitation of alcohol advertisement—all of which are promoted by the World Health Organization (WHO)

as best practices (the so-called “three best buys” of alcohol policy). (IOGT also advocates for the other recommendations outlined by WHO).

IOGT’s advocacy work is conducted largely at the global level and has included activities such as supporting countries in arranging discussions about the benefits of alcohol taxation at the UN Commission for Social Development and speaking about the harms of alcohol consumption at the UN High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development.

National-level advocacy

IOGT’s global alcohol policy advocacy often intersects with advocacy at the national level. It may speak with and provide advice to ministers from different national governments at global meetings, basing its recommendations on the specific situation of a particular country, and member organizations may continue conversations at the national level.

Other organizations working on alcohol control

Organizations (aside from the aforementioned IOGT, GAPA, and WHO) that are working on alcohol control—although not necessarily on policy alone—include:

- **The International Federation of the Blue Cross (IBC)** – Various IBC member organizations work on national-level alcohol policy, with a focus on treatment and rehabilitation of individuals with alcohol dependence. The geographical areas that IBC targets are different from the areas covered by IOGT, although IBC has requested assistance from IOGT to strengthen its policy work. Blue Cross Kenya is the only organization that is a member of both IBC and IOGT (strictly, it is not yet a member of IOGT, but has applied for membership). Blue Cross Kenya partners with IOGT-NTO Sweden in its development work.
- **The Alcohol Policy Network (APN)** – APN is an informal network of mostly individuals interested in alcohol policy and does not conduct regular activities.
- **Dianova International** – Dianova International is mostly focused on drug policy but is involved in some work around alcohol control.
- **The International Council on Alcohol and Addictions (ICAA)** – ICAA is involved in alcohol control, although its activities are not conducted with regularity.
- **NCD Alliance** – NCD Alliance is a partner of IOGT and is involved in global policy on harmful use of alcohol, among other risk factors for non-communicable diseases.
- **Vital Strategies** – Vital Strategies is focused largely on road safety but is beginning to engage at a lower level with alcohol policy.

Room for more funding

Ms. Sperkova estimates that total global funding for work on alcohol control is under \$10 million and includes (numbers below are approximations):

- \$200,000 provided to IOGT (33% allocated to advocacy work and remainder allocated to administration partially supporting advocacy and other non-advocacy activities)
- \$5 million provided to IOGT Norway
- \$2 million provided to IOGT-NTO Sweden

Lack of philanthropic attention

IOGT has been unsuccessful in its search for philanthropic funding to support work on alcohol control. However, it is conceivable that philanthropists who have experienced issues with alcohol consumption exist and would like to be involved in control work. The only potential source of philanthropic interest that IOGT is currently aware of is from certain Rotary Clubs, although these groups would be interested in prevention activities and not policy or advocacy. Bloomberg Philanthropies engages somewhat with alcohol issues as part of its initiative on road safety, although it has been explicit about its lack of interest in supporting alcohol control.

*All GiveWell conversations are available at
<http://www.givewell.org/research/conversations>*