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With the highest adult smoking rate in the Afro Region, Botswana urgently needs a strong tobacco control law to protect its citizens from the devastating effects of tobacco

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According to statistics from the [Global Adult Tobacco Survey \(GATS\) Botswana](#) report launched on Thursday 17 December 2020 by the country's Minister of Health and Well-being, Dr Edwin Dikoloti, 240,000 adults aged 15 and above (17.6%) use tobacco. This is the highest tobacco use rate in the WHO Afro Region.

This is a frightening situation given the fact that tobacco is the leading cause of preventable death, killing at least 8 million people globally each year and creating an enormous economic and environmental burden to the society.

Botswana ratified the [WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control \(FCTC\)](#) on January 31, 2005. As a party to the convention, it is required to adopt and implement measures to protect its citizens from the harms of tobacco.

Unfortunately, statistics from the GATS report reveal a rather precarious situation. For example, the report reveals that cigarettes were purchased in single sticks by 82.2% of adults. The tobacco industry works hard to maintain the sale of cigarettes in single sticks as it renders the product available and affordable for all, thereby facilitating addiction.

The GATS Botswana report also discloses that 12.2% of adults who worked indoors were exposed to tobacco smoke. 13.8% of adults were exposed to tobacco smoke in their homes and 67.4% were exposed to tobacco smoke while visiting bars and night clubs. This is another worrying situation as the World Health Organization has affirmed that exposure to tobacco smoke is significantly harmful. Of the 8 million deaths caused by tobacco annually, [1.2 million are the result of non-smokers being exposed to second-hand smoke](#).

Also, 42.5% of current smokers thought about quitting because of warning labels on cigarette packages. While this is evidence that effective warning labels on packs of tobacco products have the potential to help smokers quit, they are unfortunately nonexistent in Botswana. The survey indicates that 83.9% of adult smokers were interested in quitting but only 7% successfully did so. Prioritizing effective health warnings on tobacco packs will certainly be beneficial to the government and the people of Botswana.

Increasing the prices of tobacco products by adequately taxing them is also proven to bring down smoking rates and at the same time increase government revenue.

The results of the GATS Botswana are quite disturbing and highlight the need for strong and urgent measures to save thousands of people from the deadly effects of tobacco. While congratulating the government for conducting this survey, we call on it to step up efforts to solve the problems identified by the survey. We urge the government to accelerate the process for the adoption of the tobacco control bill.

Tobacco companies like British American Tobacco Botswana and its allies will no doubt try to delay the adoption of the bill or weaken it. But whatever argument they make or action they take, their objective is always to make profits and never to ensure the well-being of the population.

Botswana is now known to have the highest adult smoking rate in the African region. The country urgently needs to pass its tobacco control bill to reverse this situation.

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ATCA is a non-profit, non-political Pan-African network of civil society organizations headquartered in Lome, Togo. With membership in 38 countries, ATCA is dedicated to promoting public health and preventing the tobacco epidemic in the continent.