

AFRICAN TOBACCO CONTROL ALLIANCE



COVID-19
AND TOBACCO
CONTROL
IN AFRICA

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Disclosure

&

Acknowledgment

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Background

- ❖ COVID-19 declared a pandemic in 2020
- ❖ Over 650mil cases globally, over 12.7mil in Africa
- ❖ Over 6.6mil deaths globally, over 250k in Africa
- ❖ Tobacco kills about 8 million people annually
- ❖ Smoking increases the risk of respiratory infections, weakens the immune system and is implicated in many chronic health conditions
- ❖ Smoking is associated with increased severity of disease and mortality in patients hospitalized for COVID-19

COVID-19

preys on lungs,

**while the tobacco industry
makes them more vulnerable.**

TobaccoExposed



**World Health
Organization**

To investigate and document how tobacco control may have been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic in Africa including how the tobacco industry may have exploited the COVID-19 pandemic to interfere with tobacco control in the continent

A magnifying glass with a black frame is positioned over a blurred background of golden-brown, textured material. The word "objective" is printed in a large, bold, black, sans-serif font across a white horizontal band that passes through the center of the magnifying glass lens.

objective



METHODOLOGY

A qualitative research design in 2 phases

Phase 1: A desktop review of available evidence on the internet (including social media):

to ascertain the activities of the tobacco industry documented in published and grey literature as well as on social media

Phase 2: Key informant interviews with key stakeholders of tobacco control:

to collect information on firsthand experience of tobacco industry activities in various African countries

Methodology: Phase 1

a) Market scan of tobacco companies in Africa:

- Euromonitor database: manufacturing hubs in African countries
- Google search terms: “tobacco manufacturing company” AND “Africa”; “cigarette production” AND “Africa”; “cigarette manufacturing” AND “[name for each of the 54 African countries]”; and “Africa/[country name]” AND “cigarette factory”

b) Data collection method on twitter and other social media outlets

- With the official Twitter application programming interface (API) using tweepy python package – a pull-based resource that replicates the functionality of Twitter’s built-in search function
- Each tobacco company name: all related tweets - both those posted by the tobacco company as well as others posted by third parties but mentioning the tobacco company

c) Rapid review of tobacco industry activities in selected African countries from the published and grey literature

Methodology: Phase 2

- Purposive and snowball sampling methods
- Key Informant Interviews:
 - 51 key stakeholders from 17 countries in Africa contacted
 - 23 KIs from 12 countries
- Participants were 18 years or above, resident in one of the SSA countries and with at least 2 years' experience working in tobacco control
- Interviews were semi-structured and guided by an interview guide and were conducted in either French or English on a platform (Teams, Zoom, telephone) of the participants choice
- Interviews were also audio recorded and transcribed verbatim and the French interviews needing translation were translated to English

Data analysis

- Thematic analysis with the aid of the software NVivo version 12

Ethical Considerations

- Ethical clearance for phase 2 obtained from the SAMRC Human Research Ethics Committee (Protocol ID: EC021-5/2021)

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of participants

	n (N=23)
Gender	
Female	5
Male	18
Country	
Zambia	2
Ghana	2
Nigeria	3
Kenya	3
Gambia	2
South Africa	1
Benin	2
Uganda	2
Tanzania	1
Mozambique	1
Senegal	3
Ivory Coast	1
Experience in Tobacco Control*	
2 – 4 years	3
5 – 10 years	1
11 – 15 years	9
16 – 19 years	1
20 + years	5

**4 participants did not indicate their years of experience.*

Results: Phase 1

Market Scan of Tobacco Companies in Africa:

- 25 African countries with at least one local or multinational tobacco manufacturing company were identified
- Nigeria, Kenya, and South Africa were the dominant manufacturing hubs for multinational tobacco companies in the region
- Products from these hubs exported to neighboring countries in the Western, Eastern, and Southern parts of Africa, respectively

Table 2. Tobacco Companies in Africa

Country	Name	Factory/Brand name/Other comments
Algeria	British American Tobacco Algeria	
	Philip Morris Services S.A.	
	STAEM	STAEM's success can be attributed to the popularity of brands like Marlboro and L&M from Phillip Morris, Gauloise and West from Imperial Tobacco Group, and Winston and Camel from Japan Tobacco International (JTI)
	The state-owned Groupe MADAR (ex-SNTA)	
Botswana	Benson Craig (Pty) Ltd	
Burkina Faso	Imperial Tobacco	Manufacture Burkinabe de Cigarette SA
Central African Republic	Imperial Tobacco	Société Centrafricaine de Cigarettes SA
Chad	Imperial Tobacco	Manufacture de Cigarettes du Tchad SA
Congo	Imperial Tobacco	Société Industrielle et Agricole du Tabac Tropical SA
Côte D'Ivoire	Société Ivoirienne de Tabac SA (SITAB)	SITAB is the only domestic producer of cigarettes in Côte D'Ivoire. It produces the Fine, Excellence and Davidoff brands, among others
DR Congo	British American Tobacco	
Egypt	Eastern Tobacco Company	Produces its own large portfolio of economy brands, such as Cleopatra Golden King in cigarettes, Verona in cigarillos and Moassel Salloum in pipe tobacco
	Al Mansour	Licensed to manufacture the Time brand in the tobacco free zone new factory in Egypt.
	Al Nakhla Tobacco Co, which is now owned by Japan Tobacco Inc	Offers a wide range of brands of smoking (loose) tobacco, including Nakhla, Mizo and Fakhfakhina
Ethiopia	Eastern Tobacco Company	Eastern Tobacco Company or Eastern Co. is an Egyptian entity that signed an agreement with Ethiopia to plant tobacco in the East African country
	National Tobacco Enterprise	

Results continued...

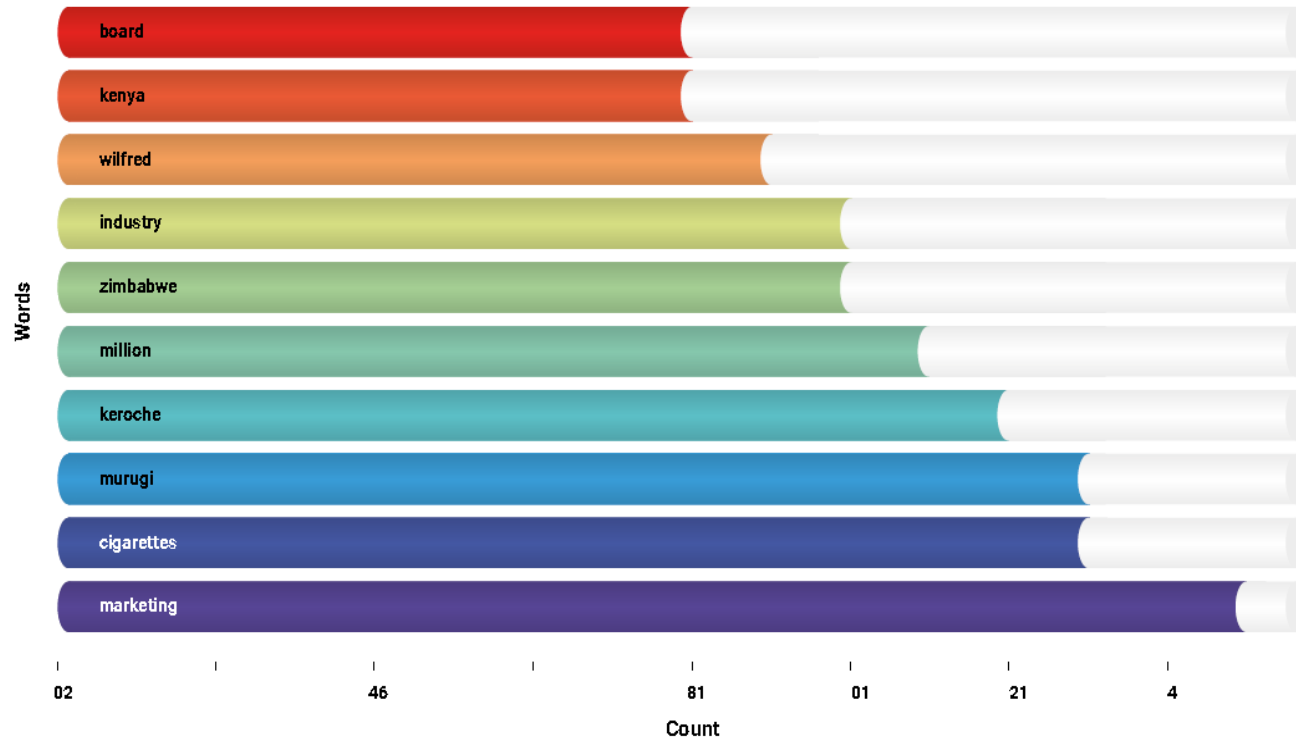


Figure 1. Top 10 most frequently tweeted words associated with tobacco companies during 2019 prior to the COVID-19 pandemic

Word cloud thematic analysis showed a dramatic shift in themes associated with industry tweets before vs during the pandemic.

Before the pandemic

- Most tweets associated with descriptors of tobacco products, companies or activities (e.g., “cigarettes”, or “multinational”).
- 3 most frequently occurring words in pre-COVID-19 tweets were “marketing”, “cigarettes”, and “murungi”

During the COVID-19 pandemic

- the key themes of tobacco industry tweets were health-related ones.
- 3 most frequently occurring words in tweets were “COVID-19”, “vaccine”, and “pandemic”

Results continued...

Table 3. Selected tweets from the media and general public in response to claims from British American Tobacco company of being involved in research and development for COVID-19 vaccine

User	Tweet	Likes
@carlquintanilla	British American Tobacco says that it has made a significant breakthrough in developing a potential plant-based vaccine for the coronavirus and hopes to manufacture up to three million doses per week by June.	249
@carlquintanilla	British American Tobacco says that it has made a significant breakthrough in developing a potential plant-based vaccine for the coronavirus and hopes to manufacture up to three million doses per week by June. \$BTI #COVID19	249
@CNBCJulianna	I can't say I saw this coming... British American Tobacco working on #COVID19 vaccine using tobacco leaves	32
@QuintFit	Cigarette maker British American Tobacco (BAT) has claimed it is ready to test its #COVID19 #vaccine using proteins from tobacco leaves.	29
@jameshodcroft	British American Tobacco are working on a cure for #COVID19... does it not strike anyone else as ironic that one of our greatest hopes rests with a company with the initials BAT?	26
@MarewaGlover	If it is the only effective #COVID19 vaccine, will you take it even though it was developed by British American Tobacco?	24
@Radio702	"We warned and cautioned government that the black market has a dynamic supply chain and it will capitalise on the lockdown." Johnny Moloto, External affairs South African head - British American Tobacco #COVID19 #21dayslockdown	21
@Kamsid66	Is this an example of #CSR ? Why can't we grow #Covid19 antigen in any plant other than tobacco? @FCTCofficial @ravimehro British American Tobacco working on plant-based coronavirus vaccine	16
@pauldashworth	BREAKTHROUGH: British American Tobacco claims #Covid19 vaccine breakthrough using tobacco plants. Its US based biotech business has been working on a potential vaccine for #coronavirus, which it believes could offer up to 3M doses a week from June.	8
@lmstroud89	Hmmm. Interesting. British American Tobacco & their latest on producing a vaccine for #COVID19 using tobacco leaves.	8
@judgomila	Virus-like particle plant-based COVID19 vaccine candidate from British American Tobacco using Nicotiana benthamiana. A very interesting rebranding for the tobacco industry to become biotech heroes...	7
@avfcray	Benson & Hedges owner British American Tobacco has a #COVID19 #vaccine in pre-clinical testing	5
@Jrarav3Gs	British American Tobacco developing a vaccine for Covid19 using tobacco plants. Being done at a Kentucky Bio Processing here in Owensboro.	5


The announcement by BAT about research and development for a “plant-based COVID-19 vaccine using tobacco leaves”

About us Our products How we work Sustainability Inve

This content is intended for media only

Our COVID-19 candidate vaccine given approval to progress into human trials

Plans have commenced to start the first Phase I study of BAT's COVID-19 vaccine candidate.



16 December 2020

This would be a first-time-in-human study and follows approval by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) of the Investigational New Drug application submitted by BAT.

This potential vaccine, developed by our U.S. Bio-tech arm, Kentucky BioProcessing (KBP), has been created using innovative plant-based technology. It has been developed using a unique vaccine platform that may enable the development of vaccines that have advantages over traditional vaccines, including rapid reproduction of the antigen and

Results: phase 2

THEMES

1. Impact of COVID-19 in SSA

2. State of affairs of Tobacco Control

3. Challenges faced by Tobacco Control

4. Tobacco Industry Activities/efforts to promote its agenda during covid

5. Impact of tobacco Industry efforts in SSA

6. Tobacco Industry business during COVID-19 in SSA

7. Government and CSOs countering /responding to tobacco industry efforts

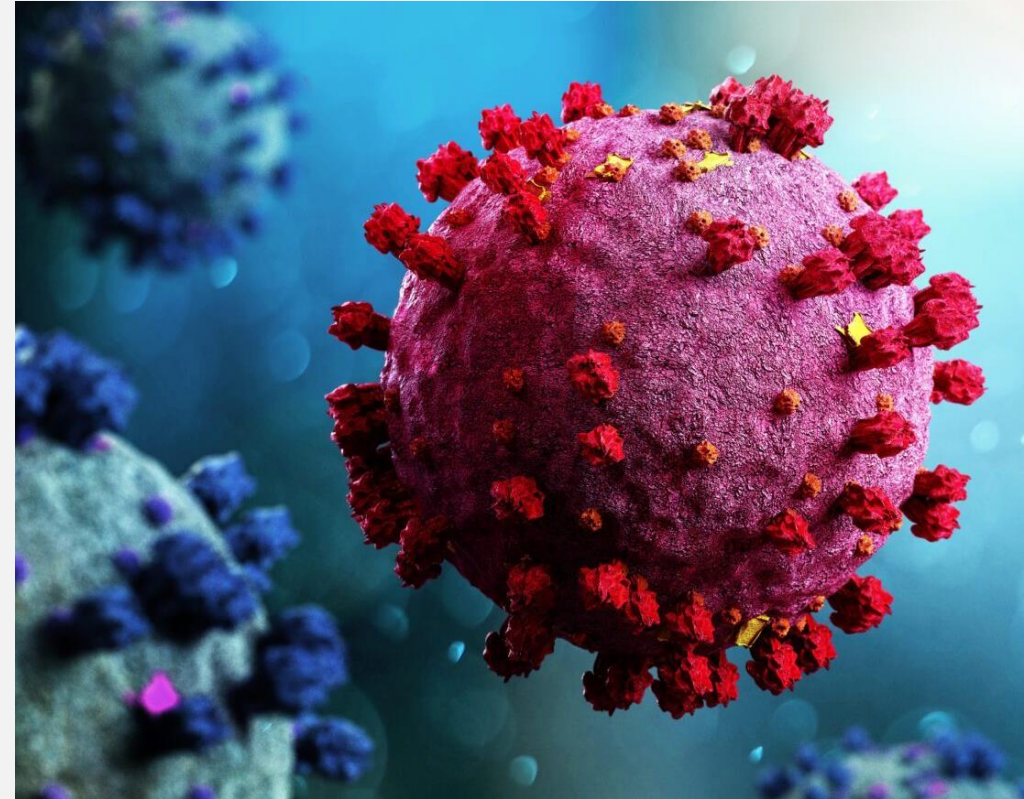
8. Efforts of implementing the WHO FCTC of the WHO Afro parties

9. Lessons learnt during this period

Results Phase 2: Impact of COVID-19 in Sub-Saharan Africa

- ❖ Economic and social impact
- ❖ Impact on the healthcare system

“most critical and maybe obvious is the health system, COVID has exposed the very under belly of our health systems in the country. Because of the fact that the health facilities are struggling to keep up with what we have, obviously we are not as bad as we hear happening in other countries, like Brazil and all that. But still, our systems are not ready and never were ready for a pandemic like this.” (Kenya_03)



The State of Affairs of Tobacco Control in SSA

❖ Opportunities brought about by COVID-19

“...from this point of view for us advocates we had a good reason to believe in our fight and to continue the fight”
(Cote D’Ivoire_01)

“I think the opportunity is when there was a ban on tobacco sales and e-cigarettes. I think that was an opportunity because the numbers showed that there are a number of people who stopped smoking. But that also came with increased push back from the tobacco industry.”
(SA_01).

❖ Advocacy work continuing as usual in some countries

“Well, I can say that the current status is that, as I said, that we are very busy in working on tobacco control legislation.”
(Mozambique_01)

Challenges faced by tobacco control in Sub-Saharan Africa during the pandemic

a. Tobacco industry promoting incorrect information

b. Inability of some advocacy organizations to function optimally

c. Reduced contact with community members

d. Concerns about increased exposure of the population to secondhand smoke

e. Slower pace of policy implementation

f. Impact on advocacy plans and financial challenges for advocacy organizations

Tobacco industry activities/efforts to promote its agenda during COVID-19

1

Maneuvering to hijacking the political and legislative or policy process

2

Exaggerating the economic importance of the industry

3

Manipulating public opinion to gain the appearance of respectability

“...the tobacco industry has taken the advantage of the COVID-19 to rebuild its image by making donations to the government of Senegal. I will give you an example of one of its bosses who contributed in the funds for COVID-19 that the government was looking for, the 1000 billion [West African CFA franc] that the government was looking for, the tobacco industry contributed around 1 billion [West African CFA franc] in the funds of COVID.” (Senegal_01).

“So, we have seen representatives of the tobacco industry in some meetings, and we know that the industry approaches the public authority and about this we cannot do anything....And even during the processes of taking the law, the industry approached the presidency and tried to infiltrate the policy about the elaboration and adoption of a law which goes in harmony with the WHO framework. (Benin_02).

“They donated sanitizer, oxygen machines, and all those kind of stuff, that was all that they could do before we began the advocacy and stopped other states.” (Nigeria_01).

Tobacco industry activities/efforts to promote its agenda during COVID-19

4

Fabricating support through front groups

5

Manipulating science

6

Intimidating government with litigation

And even the court [that the government lost], it actually accepted some of those arguments because if you hear the ruling or in some of the statements during the ruling, the court was saying the ban violates the right to dignity, to someone's freedom of choice, so I think it did affect the narrative, but, we'll keep fighting hey." (SA_01).

"Now this time they are very conscious. They don't expose their contributions, they do it secretly, privately. And it's not them coming out openly, they use front groups and their allies. Thinking that it's those people contributing but underground it's the tobacco industry. They are mostly now using their front groups and their allies... the allies are not even exposing those contributions to see that there is an impact" (Zambia 01).

"The tobacco industry are strictly bringing their own fake news that has spread all over the country and people believe in the first place before we just go and tell them about the danger of that act as we are in the pandemic season." (Benin_01).

"When COVID-19 came, the first problem was the lack of adequate information about COVID-19. And so, the social media brainwashed people about how you can use smoking not to contract COVID-19, about how, smoking because of the heat, could reduce your chances of getting the virus, of getting COVID-19." (Nigeria 01).

Impact of tobacco Industry efforts in SSA

- Impact on government
- Impact on the public
- Impact on the work of tobacco control advocates

“So, I think I can talk about it in two ways; one is, of course they are trying to normalize their business, that it is not as bad as it is being put. So, they are undoing the work that the tobacco control advocates have done”
(Uganda_02).

“In a sense, the tobacco companies end up getting positive image, they are seen as stakeholders not only in the fight against Covid but also in our agricultural sector.” (Nigeria_02).

“The impact has been that as of now, they are looking for lower taxes, they are trying to influence the legislature, and given the support by the government, the government seems to be more lenient to them.”
(Kenya_02).

Govt and CSOs countering & responding to TI interference initiatives

- Government efforts to counter the tobacco industry during COVID-19
- Civil society efforts to counter the tobacco industry during COVID-19

“The government's declaration and the message that was circulating that they encouraged people not to smoke. So, if we just stick to that in terms of a campaign message, this is a way for the government to disavow the tobacco industry.” (Cote D'Ivoire-01).

“There is a multi-sectorial group work, and this multi-sectorial group is headed by the government, by the Ministry of Health and we are working on the different issues on economics of tobacco and how the health professional, they assist those people smoking to quit, and those who have contracted the diseases related to tobacco use.” (Mozambique_01)

“When the Covid-19 emerged, once the links were established, we began our advocacy, our awareness creation to the public, you know engaging the media, our media colleagues and then also granting interviews, issue out releases to let the whole world and government know that tobacco is a killer and it's going to increase our burden if we continue to allow smoking everywhere and there's a need for us to protect people who are not smokers” (Ghana_01).

“What happened in the beginning they started to give out charity or support for the institutions, like hospital, because of COVID-19 impact on the hospital...because we fully remember, but we intervened quickly to inform them, to inform the Minister of Health, that that should not be accepted.” (Gambia_01)



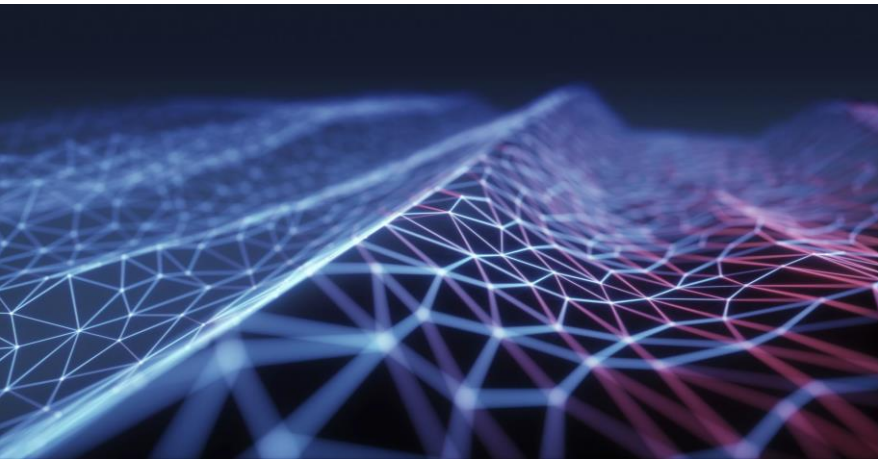
LESSONS LEARNED

Innovative tactics of the tobacco industry

Collaboration of tobacco control stakeholders is important

The importance of strong legislation

Use every opportunity to advance tobacco control policy



Recommendations

- **Proactive rather than reactive industry monitoring**
- **Provision of tobacco use cessation interventions**
- **WHO FCTC-complaint laws**
- **CSOs must push for an inclusion of and the implementation of Article 5.3 in national tobacco laws**
 - **Protect public officials from industry influence**
 - **De-normalization of the industry's so-called CSR activities**
- **Building of collaborative networks between CSOs and government**
- **Tobacco control policies should use a whole government approach; involve non-health ministries always**
- **Advocacy focus on:**
 - **No incentives, exemptions, or tax breaks for TI**
 - **Removal of duty-free status for tobacco products**

Conclusion

Big tobacco stepped up its meddling in 2020 and accelerated these efforts in 2021, even as a respiratory health crisis swept the globe

Policy makers and tobacco control advocates in Africa need to protect not just tobacco control efforts but the population from the commercial and other vested interests of the tobacco industry