



PRESS RELEASE

New report exposes how the tobacco industry exploited the COVID-19 pandemic to increase its profits at the detriment of public health.

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The African Tobacco Control Alliance (ATCA) has launched a report titled, [COVID-19 and Tobacco Industry Interference in Africa](#). Produced following a study conducted in 2021 which explored how the COVID-19 pandemic impacted on tobacco control in Sub Saharan Africa, as well as how the tobacco industry exploited the pandemic to promote its agenda, the report highlights how civil society organizations (CSOs), governments and other stakeholders responded to the threat posed by industry activities to tobacco control in the continent.

According to the report, the tobacco industry largely and successfully used strategies like creating publicity stunts, including announcing their interest to manufacture a COVID-19 vaccine made from the tobacco plant, making donations, litigation, and marketing their products through online platforms to interfere in tobacco control policies. It further notes that CSOs in some countries alerted the government and the public on some of the ways the industry had sought to galvanise its business and launder its image during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Launching the report in a webinar on Tuesday 6 December 2022, tobacco control experts in the continent decried the fact that the industry profited from a health problem to further deplete the health of Africans in a bid to accumulate profits.

Pr. Lekan Ayo-Yusuf, Director of the Africa Center for Tobacco Industry Monitoring and Policy Research (ATIM) said while the tobacco industry sees Africa as its last frontier to maximize sale, it underestimated the continent's capacity to conduct research that can inform policy. He noted that apart from being a public health emergency, COVID-19 was also a socioeconomic emergency in a magnitude that has never been seen before providing the tobacco industry with a means to make its business thrive at the detriment of public health. He was hopeful that the report will galvanize African governments to take smoking cessation programs seriously, and implement Article 5.3 of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) which requires governments to protect their public health policies from commercial and other vested interests of the tobacco industry.

Dr. Catherine Egbe of the South African Medial Research Council, who co-prepared the report highlighted its methodology, findings, lessons learnt, and recommendations, while Zanele Thembu from Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids presented a case study of tobacco industry influence in South Africa during the COVID pandemic.

The report recommends that adoption and implementation of Article 5.3 of the WHO FCTC become an important focus of tobacco control advocacy in Africa. It also urges a special focus on support for tobacco cessation after the COVID-19 pandemic.

[Access the report and other useful resources.](#)

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The African Tobacco Control Alliance (ATCA) is a non-profit, non-political Pan-African network of civil society organizations headquartered in Lome, Togo. With membership in 39 countries, ATCA is dedicated to promoting public health and curbing the tobacco epidemic in the continent. The alliance is an Observer to WHO-FCTC Conference of Parties. It has a Special Consultative Status with the UN ECOSOC and is certified with the equivalence of a US Public Charity organization.