PRESS RELEASE

18 October 2023

The 2023 Africa Tobacco Industry Interference Index has been launched this Wednesday 18 October, 2023 in a virtual event attended by tobacco control advocates, government officials, the media, and other stakeholders.

The Index, produced by the African Tobacco Control Alliance (ATCA) in collaboration with the Africa Centre for Tobacco Industry Monitoring and Policy Research and the Global Centre for Good Governance in Tobacco Control (GGTC), measures how governments are responding to tobacco industry interference and protecting their public health policies from commercial and vested interests of the industry as required by Article 5.3 of the World Health Organization Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO FCTC).

Speaking during the event, Dr. Arti Singh lead author of the report, highlighted the seven indicators used by the index to measure the degree of tobacco industry interference notably tobacco industry participation in policy development, tobacco industry Corporate Social Responsibility initiatives, benefits accorded the tobacco industry, unnecessary interactions with the tobacco industry, transparency when dealing with the tobacco industry, tobacco industry conflicts of interest, and preventive measures taken by governments to protect their public health policies from tobacco industry interference.

According to the report, Zambia, Tanzania, and Cameroon have the highest tobacco industry interference with Cameroon recording the worst performance, while Uganda, Ethiopia, and Botswana have the lowest rates of tobacco industry interference, with Botswana being the best-performing country.

Judith Chekumo, Executive Secretary of the Cameroonian Tobacco Control Coalition noted that Cameroon's poor performance in the Index can be explained by the absence of a tobacco control law, despite efforts for the adoption of such a law since 2012. She noted some little progress made by the country including the adoption of pictorial health warnings, a measure that was partially implemented during the first round of images and has never progressed due to delays accorded the tobacco industry by the government. She made a call for greater monitoring of the tobacco industry in public health policies, and support to update and push for the adoption of the tobacco control bill in Cameroon.

Meanwhile, Djibril Wele, Executive Secretary of the Senegalese Ligue Against Tobacco (LISTAB), noted that access to information is their biggest setback in Senegal with most civil servants having no knowledge of tobacco industry interference. He also said that Senegal doesn't seem to have a strong political will to advance tobacco control because several policies in the law are not implemented. Citing progress in the domain of tracking and tracing to counter illicit trade in tobacco products, and the potential inclusion of novel tobacco products in tobacco taxes in the country, he called for greater collaboration between government authorities to accelerate implementation of the tobacco control law in Senegal.

Pr. Bontle Mbongwe, Executive Director of the Anti Tobacco Network in Botswana indicated that her country's tobacco control law has a provision protecting against tobacco industry interference. Passed in 2021, the law greatly contributed to Botswana's best performance. She highlighted the need for local-level

research that produced appropriate evidence for local policy and decision-makers adding that this was a key element in Botswana's success. She called for continuous capacity building and support to government officials who have competing priorities.

Commenting on the report, Pr. Olalekan Ayo-Yusuf, Director of ATIM rejoiced with the introduction of excise taxes on e-cigarettes in two countries and called on African governments to increase tobacco taxes to the WHO-recommended level. He urged stakeholders to remain focused on vital points like capacity in research and the use of research findings for effective tobacco control advocacy. He commended African countries, most of whom have a smoking rate of less than 10% according to the report which according to him, means Africa does not need the tobacco industry-pushed harm reduction argument.

Meanwhile, Dr. Mary Assunta, lead author of the Global Tobacco Industry Interference Index said the Africa index exposes how the major tobacco companies in the world push their selfish agenda in Africa, rather than support public health. She pointed out that implementing tobacco control is possible and inexpensive, and the implementation of tobacco control laws greatly impacts public health. She called on tobacco control advocates to use the index to show governments the identified loopholes, adding that governments ought to be held accountable for the non-respect of engagements they take when ratifying the WHO FCTC.

In his closing remarks, Leonce Sessou, Executive Secretary of the African Tobacco Control Alliance (ATCA) called on tobacco control actors to use the index to foster tobacco control advocacy in their respective countries.

According to the 2023 Africa Tobacco Industry Interference Index, in comparison with their 2021 scores, three countries, Burkina Faso, Botswana, and Ethiopia showed marked improvement, while two countries Cote d'Ivoire and Zambia marginally improved. Eight countries showed deterioration from their 2021 rankings with Kenya recording the highest level of deterioration.

The Index proposes several recommendations for governments including denormalizing and banning 'socially responsible' activities by the tobacco industry, maintaining a strong stance against tobacco industry interference, fast-tracking the passing of pending tobacco control laws, building the capacity of tobacco control stakeholders, generating evidence for knowledge transfer, promoting economically viable alternative livelihoods to tobacco farming, adopting a code of conduct for interacting with the tobacco industry, and banning the sale of single sticks and duty-free tobacco products, amongst others.

Download the 2023 Africa Tobacco Industry Interference Index.

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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 the 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. It is also accredited as a regional non-state actor (NSA) not in official relations with WHO Afro.