

Africa's struggle to be smoke free

Africa is set to see a big increase in tobacco use over the coming decades, as the tobacco industry continues unduly influenced anti-smoking policies in the region. Adele Baleta reports.

Smokers watching teams slug it out on the field in pursuit of 2010 FIFA World Cup glory will have to think twice before lighting up. The South African Government has slapped an outright ban on smoking in all the stadiums where games are to be played.

South African director of Health Promotion Vimla Moodley says that stadiums will be 100% smoke free and that means there will be no designated areas for smokers. Regulations that will restrict smoking in outdoor areas are being finalised. Earlier, Jirí Dvůrák, the chief medical officer of FIFA, told *The Lancet* that smoking will not be allowed in the technical areas or in spectator stands, but suggested there would be places set aside for smoking.

In 2002, an agreement between the world soccer governing body and WHO was supposed to have blown the final whistle on smoking during World Cup matches, but in 2006—much to the chagrin of anti-tobacco lobbyists—FIFA lifted the ban after consultations with the German Government. But, with assurances from FIFA and the health ministry and the fact that South Africa has strong anti-smoking laws in place, this is unlikely to happen in this year's World Cup tournament. Moodley says the department will run a campaign to educate the public and help enforce the law. At present the country does allow smoking in designated areas (limited in size) in workplaces and the hospitality sector.

South African anti-tobacco lobbyists support moves to prevent second-hand smoke from drifting onto the pitch during the 2010 FIFA World Cup, saying that it sends out the right message particularly for the continent where 90% of Africans are unprotected by smoke-free laws.

Yussuf Saloojee, executive director of the National Council Against Smoking of South Africa says anti-tobacco legislation allows for the regulation of smoking in any area where people gather. "We are pushing for smoke-free fan parks where games will be televised and for adequate anti-smoking signs, so people get the message loud and clear".

"The greatest obstacle to smoke-free air is multinational tobacco companies..."

In its global tobacco epidemic report released at the end of last year, WHO said only 5.4% of the world's population was covered by comprehensive smoke-free laws in 2008, up from 3.1% in 2007. Additionally, seven countries—Colombia, Djibouti, Guatemala, Mauritius, Panama, Turkey, and Zambia—implemented comprehensive smoke-free laws in 2008, bringing the number of smoke-free nations to 17.

Although this shows a positive trend, tobacco use continues to be the leading preventable cause of death, killing more than 5 million people a year, WHO's report states. Unchecked, it will kill more than 8 million people a year by 2030, with more than 80% of those deaths occurring in developing countries. To prevent this trend the UN body has announced that it will expand its efforts to increase tobacco control in Africa.

Ala Alwan, WHO's Assistant Director-General for Non-communicable Diseases and Mental Health said: "Urgent action is needed to protect people from the death and illness caused by exposure to tobacco smoke." In the 46 countries of WHO's African region, non-communicable diseases—for which tobacco use is

a major risk factor—are expected to account for 46% of deaths by 2030.

The report focuses on the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control's (FCTC) Article 8, which addresses protection from exposure to tobacco smoke. The convention, which took effect in 2005, is ratified by nearly 170 countries. The guidelines state that smoke-free laws must cover all enclosed public places, workplaces, and public transport without exemption, include other places as appropriate and avoid designated smoking rooms, ineffective ventilation, and air filtration schemes.

According to a 2009 smoke-free status report, *Global Voices: Rebutting the Tobacco Industry, Winning Smokefree Air*, Africans are set to experience the highest increase in the rate of tobacco use among developing countries.

Published by the multipartner Global Smokefree Partnership, the report's authors, like WHO, are optimistic about the future, saying that several African countries had taken up the fight against the tobacco industry's "aggressive efforts" to stop public health efforts against smoking. Smoke-free public places were one



Kenya has launched smoking zones to protect non-smokers from cigarette fumes



Gerty Images

Tobacco companies have influenced smoking policies in tobacco-growing nations

example of a low cost and extremely effective intervention that must be implemented now to protect health.

Evan Blecher, a South African economist in the International Tobacco Control Research Program at the American Cancer Society predicts that tobacco consumption will double in the next 12 to 13 years in sub-Saharan Africa without major policy interventions. Consumption, was mainly driven by economic development, he says. "As income rises, so does tobacco consumption (nearly on a one-to-one basis) and developing countries are growing rapidly, China and India are growing at more than 8% a year and the average economic growth in Africa is 5% a year." These figures could be compared with Europe and the USA, where economic growth has been around 2% a year.

Mozambique, one of the fastest growing economies, has seen a 220% growth in cigarette consumption over the past 16 years and its disease and cancer burden is expected to double. Nigeria's consumption has rocketed by 60%. Blecher told *The Lancet* that there was greater effort from tobacco multinational organisations to market their products in Africa in the face of a relatively weaker policy environment in terms of taxes, advertising bans, and smoke-free policies when compared with developed countries.

Taxing cigarettes has had a direct bearing on consumption. In South Africa, he says consumption fell by a third (33%) between 1993 and the mid-2000s as a result of substantial tax increases during that period. In the past few years, consumption has remained relatively flat because of more moderate tax increases, which have only kept up with inflation and economic growth.

The *Global Voices* report says that companies try to influence African governments, particularly in countries that grow tobacco, to believe that tobacco is important to economic activity and that raising taxes on cigarettes will lead to revenue and job losses. It calls on governments to continue to act if they are to meet the goal of protecting people from second-hand smoke by 2012. It adds that most countries will need to bolster existing smoking restrictions to meet this target.

Within the past year, Kenya and Niger have enforced national smoke-free policies, and South Africa, which has been smoke-free since March, 2007, "continues to play an important role in the region, demonstrating that smoke-free laws can work in Africa", the report states. These countries, however, fall short of the robust anti-smoking FCTC standard in that they allow designated smoking rooms. Mauritius is the first country in Africa to adopt a comprehensive smoke-free law—which excludes designated smoking rooms—bringing it the closest to meeting the standards set by the FCTC.

Implementation of smoke-free legislation remains a challenge in many countries including Uganda, Ghana, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The Nigerian Parliament is considering tobacco control legislation. Meanwhile, local legislation is currently in force in the capital of Abuja where 55% of school students are not aware that second-hand smoke is harmful to health. Proposals for a new national law are also being developed in Burkina Faso.

The greatest obstacle to smoke-free air is multinational tobacco companies that stand to lose billions of dollars if anti-tobacco laws are implemented, the report says. It accuses the companies of resorting to using fake science and scare stories and buying influence in an attempt to keep Africans puffing away or breathing in second-hand smoke.

In Kenya, for example, industry has issued a legal challenge to a strong smoke-free law passed by the parliament. In Zambia, British American Tobacco's (BAT) political influence has helped dilute proposals for smoke-free legislation. In the most recent challenge to South Africa's recently amended anti-smoking laws—BAT South Africa which controls 95% of the cigarette market in the country—is fighting for its "constitutional right" to market cigarettes. BAT wants the court to lift a ban on one-to-one communication with smokers. If BAT does not succeed it wants the court to declare the ban an infringement of its constitutional rights to market. If it does succeed, it could reverse the Tobacco Control Amendment Act passed in August last year, which effectively curtails the marketing opportunities for tobacco companies. Usual advertising methods were banned in 2000, forcing companies there to find other ways to reach their audience.

The South African National Council Against Smoking says that BAT South Africa is going to court to try to overturn laws that restrict them from advertising cigarettes to young people by word-of-mouth invitations to smoking parties where free cigarettes are handed out. BAT has denied this saying that the communication they were seeking had nothing to do with children or non-smokers and that references to parties or any other gatherings were disingenuous since all forms of mass advertising had been banned in the country.

Adele Baleta