

Drinks industry supplanting government role in alcohol policies in Sub-Saharan Africa

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A recent comparison of proposed national alcohol policies in Lesotho, Malawi, Uganda, and Botswana shows that the drinks industry has assumed a significant and detrimental role in designing national alcohol policies in Sub-Saharan Africa. The policy drafts point to the alcohol industry's preferred version of a national alcohol policy, which includes letting the industry regulate its own marketing activities.

In a study published in the January issue of the journal *Addiction*, researchers Rystein Bakke and Dag Endal found that that alcohol policy documents from the four African countries were almost identical, and were likely based on a single source document that reflects alcohol industry interests. That source document originates from a series of [alcohol policy](#) initiatives in Sub-Saharan countries sponsored by multinational brewer SABMiller and the International Center on Alcohol Policies (ICAP), an alcohol industry-funded organisation.

The proposed national alcohol policies emphasise the economic benefits of the alcohol trade and the positive health impacts from alcohol consumption. Three of the drafts cite "self-regulation by the alcohol beverage industry as the most suitable way to manage marketing and promotions." All four proposed policies prescribe "active participation of all levels of the beverage alcohol industry as a key partner in the policy formulation and implementation process."

When approached for comment, SABMiller said that workshops which took place prior to the policies being drafted included significant

discussion about population-based measures and references to relevant World Health Organisation (WHO) sponsored research. However, the draft policies contain few of the best-practice policy recommendations developed by independent researchers working on behalf of the WHO. They also fail to address alcohol's role in key development issues such as HIV/AIDS, gender-based violence, child rights, and social and economic deprivation.

The authors observe that the timing of the policy initiative suggests that it was spurred by the 2005 WHO alcohol initiative, and may represent an attempt to establish policies in Africa before WHO recommendations have a chance to influence their content.

Authors Bakke and Endal state: "Few, if any, would accept Philip Morris as the designer of the tobacco policy for a national government. The [alcohol](#) industry's current policy proposals in several Southern African states can hardly be viewed any differently."

More information: Bakke R. and Endal D. Alcohol policies out of context: Drinks industry supplanting government role in alcohol policies in Sub-Saharan Africa. *Addiction* 2010; 105: 22-28

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