

Nigeria isn't doing enough to reduce tobacco use. Here's why

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Tobacco remains the biggest public health threat, killing more than [seven million](#) people globally every year. The [World Health Organisation](#)

[\(WHO\)](#) has recognised progress in Nigeria, but concerns remain about effective implementation.

Nigeria is a key [tobacco](#) industry market in Africa because of its [population size](#) and access to other markets in the region. One of the largest publicly traded [tobacco companies](#) in the world, British American Tobacco, built a state-of-the-art manufacturing plant in the country in 2003 to service [West African countries](#). In 2016, BAT opened its new West Africa Head Office in [Lagos](#).

A Global Adult Tobacco Survey done six years ago estimated that [4.5 million](#) Nigerian adults smoked. The country has an estimated population of [198 million](#). Nearly a third of the adult population was exposed to secondhand smoke.

Nigeria started trying to [regulate tobacco smoking in the 1970s](#). But it only enacted its first [tobacco smoking control decree](#) in 1990. This made Nigeria one of the first African countries to regulate tobacco. But the decree became less and less relevant because the government didn't raise public awareness or prioritise [implementation](#).

In 2005, Nigeria signed the [WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control](#). But it took until 2015 to pass a law, the [National Tobacco Control Act](#) to implement the framework.

Nigeria's 2015 National Tobacco Control Act was an [improvement on the 1990 Act](#) because, among other things, it:

- regulated the interaction of government and industry,
- regulated e-cigarettes, and other tobacco products,
- established the National Tobacco Control Committee (a multisectorial coordinating mechanism) and a Tobacco Control Fund, and

- stipulated more stringent measures for violating the law.

But the law had lots of [loopholes](#). And three years later it still hasn't been implemented.

Why implementation is moving so slowly

The non-implementation of the 2015 tobacco law is due to [problematic clauses](#) slipped in late in the process of passing it.

In particular, the act includes the unprecedented requirement that regulations prepared by the federal ministry of health must be approved by the National Assembly. This additional step slows down the process. It also provides another opportunity for the tobacco industry to block progress.

The regulations have not yet been submitted to the National Assembly.

The law also requires the Standards Organisation of Nigeria, a body that regulates products, to issue guidelines for regulating tobacco products.

A major problem with the organisation is that the tobacco industry dominates its processes. For example, tobacco industry representatives outnumber those from other agencies on the committee that writes the guidelines.

The Standards Organisation has defended this situation by saying it is mandated by law to include the industry. But having the tobacco industry on the committee is a serious impediment to developing effective regulations.

Another problem with these guidelines is that they only cover cigarettes at present, not all tobacco products. This leaves snuff, hookah, pipe, and

e-cigarettes without any regulatory guidelines.

The tobacco industry in Nigeria is [aware of every move](#) the government makes even before new measures are introduced. This is because it has representatives on the regulatory committee as well as through membership of the National Tobacco Control Committee. This means that the industry is in a position to mobilise against any new regulations.

These situations represent clear conflicts of interest and violate Article 5.3 of the WHO's [framework](#) which commits parties to insulate public health policy making process from the tobacco industry's interference.

Moving Forward

Fresh efforts have been made to close the loopholes in the 2015 law by getting an updated law [through the Senate](#). This includes ensuring that there is zero industry interference

Because of its size, Nigeria has the potential to boost the global anti-tobacco movement. But this requires it to have comprehensive laws in place that are compliant with the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control. And that are properly implemented and evaluated.

Advocates and policymakers in other African and low and middle income countries should [learn from Nigeria's experience](#) and focus on making laws that are strong from the outset.

And since the [tobacco industry](#) is a major threat to comprehensive and effective [tobacco control](#) policies, countries should ensure strict compliance with the framework to ensure non-interference – direct or indirect.

The other step the Nigerian government needs to address is the fact that

tobacco control is massively underfunded. Tobacco control is mostly funded by international donor agencies rather than the government. It's time the government took responsibility for the lives of its people and adequately fund tobacco control activities.

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