

CTCA: A resource centre for advancing tobacco control in Africa

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The Centre for Tobacco Control in Africa (CTCA) was established to build and sustain institutional capacity of African governments in tobacco control. It is hosted by the Makerere University School of Public Health and co-managed by a consortium of two Ugandan organizations, with oversight and guidance provided by a multinational Steering Committee. The CTCA is supported by the World Health Organization (WHO) and funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

CTCA is a ‘go-to’ resource Centre for Tobacco Control in Africa and was launched in November 2011, with the overall mandate of supporting African Governments to advance tobacco control policies and legislation. This is done through the provision of technical support, materials and tools kits, creating a platform for dialogue, experience sharing, and innovation in tobacco control in six target countries including Angola, Gambia, Kenya, Mauritania, South Africa and Uganda.



CTCA being launched by Speaker, Minister for Health, WHO TFI & Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation Representative in Kampala, Uganda.

Burden of Tobacco Use

Globally tobacco use is responsible for about 6 million deaths or one death every six seconds globally, mostly in low and middle income countries. In Africa there are about 400 adult deaths every hour of every day. Additionally, exposure to second hand smoke is responsible for 600,000 deaths globally and mainly among women and children (1,2). It has been proven that tobacco use negatively impacts on reproductive health, increases tuberculosis (TB) incidence and mortality and is the single most risk factor for non-communicable diseases (NCDs) (heart diseases, neoplasms, respiratory illness etc). Therefore tobacco use is a silent epidemic which has been associated scientifically with many illnesses, hence taking centre stage in public health, requiring resolute efforts to design and implement tobacco control policies and programs. Tobacco use imposes enormous public health and financial costs to African countries, costs that are completely avoidable. Until we end tobacco use, more young people will become addicted, more people will become sick, and more families will be devastated by the loss of loved ones.

Role of CTCA in advancing tobacco control in Africa

The CTCA has been a catalytic force in moving tobacco control forward in the first six target countries and five non-target countries of Rwanda, Tanzania, Botswana, Ethiopia and Zambia on the African continent. It has provided the technical and financial resources to create comprehensive and strong tobacco control bills, policies and regulations as well as provided momentum to the Ministries of Health to develop tobacco control policies and programs thereby raising the profile of tobacco control. Additionally, the Centre has provided a platform for dialogue among the tobacco control actors including parliamentarians, civil society organizations (CSOs), academia and media fraternity. Furthermore, CTCA has built capacity of African governments and CSOs through training, developing and availing toolkits and orientation of key stakeholders in several countries.

CTCA Engaging countries and Civil Society Organizations to advance tobacco Control in Africa

Important to note is the role of facilitating and supporting linkages for tobacco control between governments and other partners, including establishment of country coordination mechanisms and collaborations with other regional tobacco control organizations to advocate for harmonized tobacco control policies within the regional political blocs. Additionally, a networking forum for all governments in Africa has been created by CTCA to share experiences and agree on workable cost effective solutions for tobacco control in Africa.



CTCA in Mauritania engaging Government on Tobacco Control Bill



CTCA in Uganda supporting Tobacco Control Country Coordination



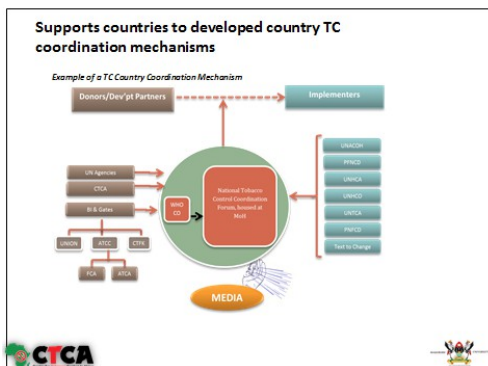
CTCA & University of Pretoria South Africa supporting development of Pictorial Health Warnings

Some of CTCA's Outputs in 2 and half years

Since its launch CTCA developed tobacco control tool kits, tobacco control coordination mechanisms and a vibrant website providing tobacco control resources and information (<http://www.Ctc-africa.org>, <http://www.ctc-africa.org/fr> , <http://www.ctc-africa.org/pt>).



Tobacco Control Tool kits developed



Tobacco Control Country Coordination Mechanism

All that glitters is not gold, the Centre faces some challenges: Interference from the tobacco industry specifically delaying the passing of tobacco control bills, manipulating unsuspecting government officials and legislators, and disguising their actions through corporate social responsibility. The other challenges include: weak coordination between Governments, partners/donors and CSOs at country level, delayed implementation of critical time bound WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control Articles such as pictorial health warnings and ban on advertising of tobacco products. These challenges are worsened by limited funding for tobacco control programs.

Future Potential

The Centre for Tobacco Control has a huge potential in Africa especially with the increasing tobacco use among the youth fuelled by aggressive promotion and tactics of the tobacco industry. More so, the African governments are still waking up to the challenge of controlling the tobacco epidemic, coupled with limited capacity and resources to implement tobacco control programs at country level. Today CTCA is a ‘go-to’ resource Centre for tobacco control in Africa, providing technical support, capacity building, platform for dialogue and resources. However, CTCA needs to bring more partners on board including the Public Health Associations in Africa and beyond and broaden the scope of actors to garner support for tobacco control.

In conclusion, CTCA is beginning to have a significant impact on the tobacco control landscape in Africa, though still in the early stages. The Centre has created a platform for discussion among governments, partners and CSOs and has availed tools, materials and resources to support tobacco control in the region. However, even with the current progress, there is a need to do more because there is evidence that comprehensive and multi-component interventions are effective in reducing tobacco control. Reducing tobacco use is a winnable battle. There is overwhelming scientific evidence that cost-effective strategies once implemented will improve health outcomes for the people in the African continent.

Note that the views expressed in this article are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the views of PHASA.

References:

1. WHO. Global Report Mortality Attributable to Tobacco. Geneva: WHO; 2012.
2. WHO. Report on the Global Tobacco Epidemic. Geneva: WHO; 2013.