

Introduction

The Sudan Federal Ministry of Health ramped up health awareness activities in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Ministry is focusing on two main areas within tobacco control: a national awareness campaign and enforcing a ban on waterpipe use in public places.

Awareness campaign during COVID-19



Sudan's Federal Ministry of Health, on 20 March 2020, launched an awareness campaign focusing on COVID-19 prevention, protection and risk factors. Within that, smoking was highlighted as one of the key risk factors. The campaign—in collaboration with the World Health Organization (WHO)—was in partnership with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), and Save the Children on the funding side and with nongovernmental organizations and the Sudanese Red Cross for wider distribution of messages. The awareness campaign included the use of flyers, posters and billboards on main roads. The posters were clearly displayed in public places such as markets, restaurants and cafés. The posters were also distributed through the Health Promotion Directorate's Facebook page and social media platforms as well as through WhatsApp messaging.

Sudan's Federal Ministry of Health has adapted its communication strategy to reach communities during lockdown and restrictions. Dr Sara Elmalik, Manager of the Health Promotion Directorate at the Federal Ministry of Health stated: "The communication strategy with the community has changed because people are staying at home". The strategy included the development of a song titled 'Salam al'ayd ana khalito' (I had stopped shaking hands). The song was widely disseminated through radio, television and social media platforms. The Ministry is using text messaging to reach out to communities targeting more than 1 million mobile subscribers. The Ministry is launching shortly a message around the dangers of using waterpipes which callers will hear when they are on waiting. In addition, the Ministry is using megaphones to broadcast different announcements to communities. Key television programmes hosted specialists to talk about the use of tobacco and respiratory diseases. Viewers were able to interact with these specialists by calling in and asking questions. In addition, the Khartoum State Tobacco Control Programme conducted a number of awareness raising activities such as the distribution of 20 000 brochures and 10 000 posters in seven localities. The Programme held orientation sessions targeting hotels, restaurants and mosques as well as various audiences such as employees of government and private companies, prisoners and homeless children.

A study is planned, in partnership with UNICEF, to measure the impact of the awareness campaign. A key challenge has been the lack of a specific fund for tobacco control activities—therefore, funds are reallocated to tobacco control from other health promotion activities.

Ban on waterpipes in public places



The General Secretariat of the Khartoum State Government issued a decree, on 19 March 2020, banning waterpipe use across Sudan. The decision was published in national newspapers and discussed widely on their pages however, the press service has been discontinued since, due to COVID-19. The decree was met with some resistance and many violations from restaurants and cafés. Using waterpipes in the privacy of homes, especially by youth, still poses a challenge.

Way forward

The Government of Sudan has developed a country-wide transition plan to eventually return to normal activities, subject to the COVID-19 situation across the country. Future plans are in place to continue the ban on tobacco use in public places especially waterpipes after the lockdown restrictions are relaxed.

Future plans include: the issuance of a number of ministerial decrees covering graphic health warnings; a total ban on tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship including corporate social responsibility activities in line with Article 13 of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO FCTC); and rules of engagement with the tobacco industry in line with Article 5.3 of the WHO FCTC. In addition, high level political engagement and advocacy is planned to support the implementation of graphic health warnings.

Future plans also include a tailored mass media campaign to raise awareness of the risks of tobacco products in particular Toombac and waterpipes. Lastly, a number of trainings are planned for all government sectors, nongovernmental organizations and parliament members to help counteract the industry's interferences and to protect from potential legal issues

Related links

[Sudan's Federal Ministry of Health website](#)

[Sudan's Federal Ministry of Health Facebook](#)

[Sudan's Federal Ministry of Health awareness campaign post on banning waterpipe use \(Facebook\)](#)

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