



Context

In 2007, Afghanistan implemented its initial legislation to address tobacco advertising and promotion. According to Article 16 of the Afghan Advertisement Procedure, all forms of tobacco product promotion, advertisement and other harmful products were fully prohibited on national TV, radio and magazines. However, this legislation did not extend to other channels of tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship. Additionally, it did not establish fines for violations. By 2009, five years after the legislation's implementation, compliance with the existing regulations was reported to be at a moderate level (5 out of 10) in the WHO Report on the Global Epidemic Tobacco of 2013.

Initiative

Following Afghanistan's ratification of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) on 13 August 2010, progress has been made in tobacco control efforts. A national tobacco control coordination committee, comprising 70 members from relevant ministries, sectors, UN agencies and civil society has been established to hold regular meetings. Additionally, a tobacco control taskforce consisting of 20 members conducts monthly meetings and collaborates with the private sector to support tobacco control events. This strong multisectoral coordination has provided a boost to tobacco control in Afghanistan. In line with the implementation of Article 13 of the WHO FCTC, Afghanistan introduced its first dedicated tobacco control law in 2015. This legislation included a comprehensive ban on tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship, as well as the imposition of fines for violations.

To ensure the effective implementation of the law, the Ministry of Public Health has developed and adapted guidelines for its implementation. Various sectors, including municipalities, the union for hotel workers, the environmental health department, the national environment protection administration, the police and the Ministry of transport and tourism have been involved in monitoring law enforcement. Numerous initiatives have been undertaken to raise public awareness and strengthen the enforcement of the law. For example, the Ministry of Public Health has conducted training sessions for hundreds of police officers, published informative articles on tobacco control through social media platforms, participated in interviews with television and radio stations and regularly organized press conferences to commemorate World No Tobacco Day. Furthermore, there has been effective coordination and follow-up with relevant authorities at the national and provincial levels, as well as nongovernmental organizations, to facilitate the implementation of the tobacco control law.

Challenges and lessons learnt

Several challenges have been identified in relation to the tobacco control law. Loopholes in the legislation have allowed for tobacco industry interference, and compliance with the indirect bans has been low. Notably, the law lacks explicit provisions addressing cross-border advertising, the display of tobacco products at points of sale, internet sales of tobacco products and corporate social responsibility of the tobacco industry. In the past year, tobacco companies were able to influence and modify three articles of the tobacco law. In response, the Ministry of Public Health joined forces with the Parliament and the Ministry of Justice to initiate the process of re-amending these articles. It is worth noting that compliance with the direct bans has been relatively high, scoring 8 out of 10 according to the WHO Report on the Global Tobacco Epidemic of 2019. One particularly successful aspect of this initiative has been the collaboration with religious leaders, who have lent their support to the ban on tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship.

Impact

While a direct assessment of the ban on smoking in public places in Afghanistan has not been conducted, data from the Global Youth Tobacco Survey in 2010 and 2017 provide valuable insights. The findings indicate a notable decline in certain indicators among youth. Specifically, there was a 13.2% decrease in the proportion of youth reporting being offered free tobacco products or cigarettes by tobacco company representatives. Additionally, there was a significant 24.5% decline in the percentage of youth who reported watching actors smoking on TV. These data suggest a positive impact on youth exposure to tobacco-related influences.

Next steps

To facilitate the effective implementation and enforcement of the tobacco control law, there is a need for enhanced financial and technical support. The aim is to prevent any potential interference from the tobacco industry and ensure the successful implementation of a comprehensive ban on tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship. By securing strengthened resources, the efforts to control tobacco use can be bolstered, further protecting public health and advancing tobacco control initiatives.

References

[Global Youth Tobacco Survey](#)

[MPOWER measures to reduce demand for tobacco](#)

[WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control](#)

[WHO Report on the Global Epidemic Tobacco 2013](#)

[WHO Report on the Global Epidemic Tobacco 2019](#)

Story originated in 2019.

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