



Tobacco Control Success Story: Bangladesh

The [Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids](#) (CTFK) helped Bangladesh reduce adult tobacco use by 18.5% between 2009 and 2017. Exposure to second-hand smoke declined significantly in homes (-15.9%) and public spaces, with restaurants and healthcare facilities seeing declines of 30% and 11.1%, respectively. These public health successes are the result of policy changes advocated for by CTFK and its partners in Bangladesh.

THE CHALLENGE

The tobacco industry's aggressive interference in policymaking poses an ongoing challenge to tobacco control in Bangladesh. In 2009, over 43% of adults used tobacco and 63% of workers were exposed to tobacco smoke in the workplace, according to the country's first-ever [Global Adult Tobacco Survey](#) (GATS).

The country's largest tobacco company, British American Tobacco Bangladesh (BAT Bangladesh), recruits government officials as board members, and the government owns almost 10% of its shares —creating a clear conflict of interest. Additionally, a number of lawmakers have personal business ties to the industry or own shares in tobacco companies, particularly the politically influential companies that produce local cigarettes called *bidis*.

To influence policymakers and public opinion, the industry runs high-profile corporate social responsibility (CSR) campaigns and uses innovative marketing tactics. It sponsors numerous front groups and has high-profile partnerships with academia, civil society, media and government. Tobacco executives are known to collaborate with important government ministries, such as Agriculture, Labour and Employment and the National Board of Revenue. Ministries that could aid in tobacco control, including the Ministries of Health and Finance, have not made it a priority and often work at cross purposes. For the tobacco laws that do exist, enforcement had historically been weak.

OUR ROLE

CTFK and its partners supported Bangladesh's tobacco control efforts in critical ways:

- **Creating robust civil society engagement** with voices from women's, physicians', consumers' and public health groups. CTFK supported the creation of four groups: The United Forum Against Tobacco (UFAT) for physicians; the Anti-Tobacco Media Alliance (ATMA) for journalists; the Anti-Tobacco Alliance of Women (also known as Tamak Birodhi Nari Jote or TABINAJ) for renowned women leaders; and the Tobacco Free Bangladesh Platform for members of parliament and prominent civil society members.
- **Promoting media coverage** of tobacco control efforts and industry interference. The formation of ATMA created a new group of journalists who pursue investigative stories on tobacco policy issues and corruption.
- **Supporting enforcement** of smoke-free places and the prohibition of tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship (TAPS), including:
 - ◆ Conducting orientations to help authorities enforce smoke-free public places and public transportation;
 - ◆ Developing and distributing 'no smoking' signage and infographics;
 - ◆ Institutionalizing tobacco control activities, such as reporting and monitoring mechanisms at national, subnational and local levels;
 - ◆ Establishing focal points at relevant ministries and helping to organize regular review and taskforce committee meetings;
 - ◆ Sharing updates on tobacco control activity and aiding initiatives for proper tobacco enforcement during National Tobacco Control Cell (NTCC) coordination meetings;
 - ◆ Providing training and materials to law enforcement officials and magistrates responsible for punishing offenders under the tobacco control law, including information on TV and print media violations.



- **Raising public awareness and advocating for pack warnings** using campaigns targeted to political, media and legal players. CTFK and partners also advocated for government funding to support media campaigns, including the development and distribution of billboards and other informational and educational communication materials. Additionally, advocates conducted and facilitated public awareness programs on tobacco control compliance and organized rallies highlighting the harms of smoking.
- **Advocating for tobacco tax reforms.**
 - ◆ Educating economists, academics, local elected officials, health professionals and other professional bodies about tobacco control and the need for increased taxes;
 - ◆ Conducting research to generate fact sheets and policy briefs for advocacy;
 - ◆ Arming lawmakers with information used to argue in Parliament for tobacco control policies and increased taxes;
 - ◆ Collecting letters from members of Parliament in support of higher tobacco taxes and submitting them to the finance minister and National Board of Revenue (NBR), the country's central authority for tax administration;
 - ◆ Helping create letters from the health minister to the finance minister that proposed tobacco tax reforms;
 - ◆ Organizing human chains, sit-ins, rallies, signature campaigns, press conferences and memorandum submissions; and
 - ◆ Holding advocacy meetings with the finance minister, planning minister, health minister and NBR, as well as health professionals, journalist groups, civil society members and organizations.
- **Confronting tobacco industry interference** by alerting law enforcement of illegal activities and compelling industry to cease promotional activities, such as a BAT Bangladesh plan to host a trivia competition in public schools. CTFK and partners also exposed and protested tobacco promotion campaigns disguised as cultural activities, like the Bengal Classical Music Festival, which was supported and financed by Imperial Tobacco Company (ITC), an offshoot of BAT. Additionally, advocates filed a court case to make tobacco companies adhere to laws requiring graphic health warnings (GHW) on product packaging.

RESULTS

CTFK helped make the reduction of tobacco use a priority for federal and local policymakers, resulting in stronger enforcement and a decline in adult tobacco use from 43.3% in 2009 to 35.3% in 2017. In 2016, the prime minister set a goal to make Bangladesh tobacco-free by 2040.

Bangladesh's tobacco control laws became more compliant with the [World Health Organization's Framework Convention on Tobacco Control](#) (WHO FCTC) guidance. The country added more smoke-free public places and enforcement officers, introduced smokeless tobacco (SLT) as a tobacco product, prohibited tobacco sales to minors and purchases by minors and increased penalties for violations. Lawmakers adopted a 1% Health Development Surcharge on all tobacco products in 2014. The Ministry of Health implemented a GHW law that requires pictorial health warnings to cover 50% of all tobacco packaging.

LESSONS LEARNED

Our work in Bangladesh shows it is possible to achieve ambitious public health policy changes by engaging civil society and mobilizing government officials through education, training and advocacy.

Some valuable lessons we have learned include:

- 1 Prohibiting tobacco ads in print and electronic media leads to more innovative advertising tactics.
- 2 For the best outcomes, policy advocacy must go hand-in-hand with media interventions.
- 3 Establishing robust tobacco control groups, such as UFAT and ATMA, is an effective strategy for policy advocacy.
- 4 Partnering with government significantly increases advocacy acceptance.

ABOUT THE CAMPAIGN FOR TOBACCO-FREE KIDS

The Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids is the leading advocacy organization working to reduce tobacco use and its deadly consequences in the United States and around the world. Through strategic communications and policy advocacy campaigns, we promote the adoption of proven solutions that are most effective at reducing tobacco use and save the most lives. For more information, please visit tobaccofreekids.org or follow us on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).

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