

Building Support for Government Funding of Tobacco Control Campaigns

Reducing tobacco use is challenging in a country like Bangladesh, where various forms of tobacco are consumed and devious interference from tobacco industries into policy measures have gone largely unchecked. The government has an 11% ownership share of British American Tobacco (BAT) and has appointed several high-level officials to the company's board. Bangladesh has also taken foreign direct investments from Japan Tobacco Industries (JTI). As a result, despite its deadly toll, tobacco is categorized as an economic crop and an essential commodity, enabling production, marketing and sales to continue even during the 2020 COVID-19 lockdown.

Tobacco companies in Bangladesh have evaded taxes, engaged in child labor, manipulated the government and policy, misused fertile lands, and targeted youth.

Mass media campaigns have been shown to be an effective tool for encouraging quit attempts, delayed initiation of smoking and building support for tobacco control policies. Until 2011, the government of Bangladesh had never spent money on population tobacco control campaigns though many other countries have for decades.

Since 2011, Vital Strategies has been working with Bangladesh's government to encourage their support for national tobacco control education campaigns. Over the last nine years, we have collaboratively implemented 17 evidence-based national campaigns through billboards and signboards across the country. With the demonstrated success of these media campaigns, the government began intermittent co-funding to expand the reach of such campaigns.

A watershed moment came when the health minister agreed to launch a Public Service Announcement called "Brain" at a Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MOHFW)'s Conference in November 2015. The campaign launch event was arranged with full financial and logistic support from the MOHFW and received a significant amount of media coverage. This pleased the Ministry. Since then, Vital Strategies has partnered with the MOHFW and launched two to three campaigns each year with government support.



Population

162.7 million

Smoking Prevalence

46% of men, 25.2% of women, 9.2% of boys and 2.8% of girls currently use tobacco^{1,2}.

Tobacco Control Policies

Smoking is banned in designated public places. Tobacco advertising and promotion are prohibited in any form. Pictorial health warnings are required to cover 50% of tobacco packaging and labeling. There is currently no legislation around e-cigarette use.

Milestone

In 2004, Bangladesh was the first signatory to ratify the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC), a global treaty.

¹ Global Adult Tobacco Survey, 2017

² Global Youth Tobacco Survey, 2013



A screenshot from a government anti-industry campaign.

Vital Strategies also helped the government identify a sustainable funding mechanism for these campaigns. The government was already collecting a 1% surcharge on all tobacco products. Yet the funds, about US \$25 million a year, had not been allocated to any tobacco control programs and were sitting unused. In 2018, the government approved the management policy for the fund and started allocating small revenue budgets against the funds. In 2019, the MOHFW committed to unprecedented full funding for mass media campaigns with production support from Vital Strategies. This opened the horizon of a sustainable mechanism for mass media campaigns distribution.

A decade-long battle against tobacco industry's grip, finally came to fruition when the MOHFW fully funded the first ever anti-industry PSA in Bangladesh titled "*They Win, We Lose*" on national television. The campaign focused on the tobacco industry's detrimental activities while emphatically proclaiming "*We lose dear ones - but how easily the Tobacco Companies fill-up their customers' emptiness! They build a mountain of money and leave us wailing.*"

Despite widespread challenges and ongoing tobacco industry interference, the government of Bangladesh has taken many steps to control tobacco, including mass media campaigns, and has reduced national tobacco use from 43% to 35% between 2011 and 2018.

This case study is part of a series highlighting our work with the Bloomberg Initiative to Reduce Tobacco Use in priority countries.

About Vital Strategies

Vital Strategies is a global health organization that believes every person should be protected by a strong public health system. We work with governments and civil society in more than 70 countries to design and implement evidence-based strategies that tackle their most pressing public health problems. Our goal is to see governments adopt promising interventions at scale as rapidly as possible. To find out more, please visit www.vitalstrategies.org or Twitter @VitalStrat.