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Summary of Findings

1. Industry participation in policy development

In 2020, we did not account for incidences that the industry directly participated in when it came to policy development. However, their influence during previous years came to fruition as heated cigarettes technical regulations came into effect on the 1st of January, 2020. Moreover, the indirect influence is palpable in the action of the Ministry of Interior and their request to revisit the transfer of shisha licenses. The Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Tourism, Ministry of Trade and Industry, Jordan Standards and Metrology Organization (JSMO) and Municipalities have supported the tobacco industry in providing benefits and lobbying on their behalf.

2. Industry CSR activities

The tobacco industry managed to take advantage of the pandemic to whitewash its brand by contributing to the Himmit Watan fund in support of the COVID-19 pandemic relief. Having donated more than 500,000 JOD in direct and indirect payments would certainly give them future leverage with the government.

3. Benefits to the industry

On top of the whitewashing through corporate social responsibility (CSR), the Jordanian government promoted tobacco consumption during lockdown, and prioritized the tobacco industry's distribution and sales when the country decided to end total lockdown. The government recognized shisha cafes and stores as one of the most affected establishments to the pandemic. In addition, the environmental risk of tobacco manufacturing was set at the "limited danger" category, minimizing the true deleterious environmental impact the industry contributes.

4. Unnecessary interaction

The government welcomed an investment by the Yemini government and British American Tobacco (BAT) in the duty-free areas to manufacture tobacco locally, with an aim to mostly export the products. The investment would employ a 100% Jordanian workforce, with BAT owning 25% of the new investment.

5. Transparency

There were no specific changes in transparency in the interaction with the tobacco industry and the government. However, the Greater Amman Municipality (GAM) has notified the authors of the report of a law that can be utilized as an opening to request meeting minutes and additional documents from the government based on that. We are not aware of any NGO or governmental agency that used this law to request information or data regarding interaction with the tobacco industry.

6. Conflict of interest

We have not been able to document any new incidents of conflict of interest during the year 2020. As aforementioned, access to information and data was quite limited due to COVID-19.

7. Preventive measures

Customs requires additional documentation from the tobacco industry that must be submitted before the release of any product. This is a new effort to have periodic submissions by the industry, but is still far behind a comprehensive legislation that would require the tobacco industry to periodically submit information on tobacco production, manufacturing, market share, marketing expenditures, revenues and any other activity, including lobbying, philanthropy, political contributions and all other activities.

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Recommendations

Jordan suffered for decades from low political will to support a tobacco control agenda. However, the recent appointment of Dr. Feras Hawari as Minister of Health poses a window of opportunities that the tobacco control partners must take advantage of in order to push forward implementation of the FCTC's agenda. In the suggested recommendations based on the current report, the authors will assume that the partners will take advantage of the status of the Minister of Health by proposing stronger recommendations.

The Ministry of Health should take advantage of the Access to Information Law and request tobacco industries to release their data on users, production, lobbying, donations, CSR, philanthropies, etc.

The Ministry of Health should champion an amendment to the Public Health Law 47 to include articles on tobacco industry interference, and integrate the ministerial decisions into law articles.

The tobacco control partners should create a more collaborative road map for implementation of work with a focus on partnership and collaboration and is not limited to objectives and areas of work.

Although law changes can be a key to push forward the agenda, the tobacco industry uses them to further its own as well. The MOH's and GAM's legal department must inform the tobacco control teams in their respective organizations on these changes beforehand and as early as possible to facilitate space for counter-efforts to combat the industry.

Access to results and information from concluded projects of tobacco control partners is ethically obligated. All information and data should be communicated in an accessible way to other partners.

A Jordan-centered and tailored Article 5.3 training/workshop is necessary, as the local challenges can be different from other global challenges. The internationally run workshops might not reflect the local needs and can be not fully implemented in the country.