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SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

1. Industry Participation in Policy Development

The implementation of Cameroon's graphic health warning regulations remains heavily undermined by the tobacco industry (TI). Despite clear requirements for rotating health warning images, the TI interfered by imposing its own timelines and persuading authorities to extend the use of older images. As of June 12, 2023, the third set of images had not been applied because the Ministry of Public Health accommodated a TI request to continue using 2021 images. The Ministry also accepted the TI's offer to analyze nicotine products under the guise of proving their safety, further highlighting the industry's influence over regulatory processes.

Beyond graphic warnings, TI interference has also stalled broader tobacco control measures. The Standards and Quality Agency's Tobacco Control Committee is chaired by an industry representative, resulting in product standards that reflect industry proposals. Key regulatory texts on tobacco advertising, promotion, and sponsorship have been blocked for 17 years, while the industry's own non-compliant draft was rejected. Efforts by civil society groups, such as the Cameroon Coalition Against Tobacco, to advance stronger advertising rules and a comprehensive Tobacco Control Law have failed, as their proposals remain unadopted at the Presidency and Parliament since 2011. This obstruction underscores the depth of TI influence in Cameroon.

2. Industry CSR Activities

There were no recorded instances of TI corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities carried out in collaboration with the government.

3. Benefits to the Industry

Public authorities complied with TI requests to retain measures that violate existing regulations. A December 12, 2022 letter from VOCC (a local tobacco company) asked the Minister of Public Health not to sign the decision introducing the third set of health warning images. The warnings remain unimplemented. The government also applies differential taxation to locally produced and imported products: tobacco products from the local industry are exempt from the specific tax of 5,000 CFA francs per 1,000 cigarette sticks.

4. Unnecessary Interaction

Meetings often held by the TI and authorities to obtain advantages without the knowledge of other stakeholders have not been observed. There is no public record of senior government officials visiting tobacco companies. However, industry representatives occasionally visit relevant government departments to inquire about tobacco control initiatives.

5. Transparency

The absence of disclosure of meetings between tobacco control authorities and the TI makes it difficult to assess transparency in tobacco control policy implementation. Some tobacco control activities involve government agencies and civil society, but much information about TI activities, such as turnover, market share, and taxes paid, is not made public.

6. Conflict of Interest

There is no legal or regulatory framework prohibiting political party financing by businesses in the tobacco sector. Certain industry figures, some with familial ties to senior officials, are active members of the ruling party, Rassemblement Démocratique du Peuple Camerounais (Cameroon People's Democratic Movement).

7. Preventive Measures

Apart from general public service ethics, which require civil servants to follow rules of good conduct, there is no specific code of conduct governing interactions between officials and the TI. No procedures exist for disclosing agendas, attendance lists, or minutes of such meetings.

There are no standards for public officials engaging with the TI, nor legal provisions requiring the TI to publish information about its activities. The tax system is based on self-declaration, and although the Ministry of Finance has introduced a tax stamp system for tobacco products, it is not fully reliable. Fake tax stamps circulate, and smuggled cigarettes remain widespread, even for well-established brands.

No program or system exists to systematically raise awareness among government services of Article 5.3 of the WHO FCTC. No policy prohibits accepting contributions or gifts from the TI, including assistance, draft policies, or study visit invitations extended to officials or their relatives.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Strengthen the capacity of stakeholders on the provisions of Article 5.3 of the WHO FCTC and its Implementation Guidelines.
2. Review the draft Tobacco Control Bill with stakeholders and revive the process for its adoption.
3. Ensure compliance by authorities with the decree of January 3, 2018, regarding packaging and labeling of tobacco products.
4. Adopt a Code of Conduct to regulate interactions between public officials and the TI.
5. Establish a monitoring mechanism within the Multisectoral Tobacco Control Commission to track the regulatory and non-regulatory activities of the TI.
6. Implement the COP10 recommendations requiring parties to impose mandatory sanctions on the TI for providing false or misleading information.