

Solomon Islands



Summary of Findings

1. INDUSTRY PARTICIPATION IN POLICY DEVELOPMENT

The government does not allow the tobacco industry (TI) to participate in policy development or implementation. Despite this the TI seems to have a foothold in trying to influence policy making, primarily through persistent lobbying activities.

A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the government and Solomon Islands Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SICCI), a TI-allied organization, was signed by the Honorable Prime Minister. The Solomon Islands Tobacco Company Ltd. – British American Tobacco (SITC-BAT) is a major stakeholder at SICCI, while its CEO is a member of the SICCI Executive and an influencer representing the private sector's interest in the country. This MOU is a major setback for health and tobacco control initiatives. The arrangement and structural text of the MOU has given SITC-BAT access to influence public policy making in the country.

2. INDUSTRY CSR ACTIVITIES

SITC-BAT is increasing its influence by sponsoring politicians and implementing CSR activities in the country. The government has an open policy allowing CSR projects by the industry to aid politicians and their respective constituencies. According to the Ministry of Finance and Treasury (MFT), CSR is a positive contribution, implying that it's the duty of the TI to give back and invest in the broader community. Additionally, according to the Director MFT, the cap for SITC-BAT CSR seed money allotted to members of parliament is SBD 100,000 (USD 12,525).

3. BENEFITS TO THE INDUSTRY

The TI has direct access to government ministries such as MFT, Customs Department, Ministry of Commerce, Industry, Labor and Immigration (MCILI) as well as the Ministry of Health and Medical Services (MHMS). The MOU signed by the Prime Minister in July 2020 with SICCI, SITC-BAT is a sitting Executive member, is a massive setback which gives the industry a huge leverage in terms of influencing government policies.

4. UNNECESSARY INTERACTION

Many top-level government officers and politicians are not aware of the WHO FCTC Article 5.3 guidelines. While the Permanent Secretary and Minister of MHMS made a courageous stand to cut all connections made with the TI after they were briefed on Article 5.3, much more needs to be done.

5. TRANSPARENCY

Records of meetings and interaction of government officials with the TI are not made accessible to the public, and the TI is not held accountable by officials for the harm it causes due to lack of awareness.

6. CONFLICT OF INTEREST

Solomon Islands Political Party Integrity Bill of 2014, Section 57, made provisions for disclosure of campaign funds post-election but it does not cover nor prohibit contributions from the TI or any entity working to further

its interests. There are a number of government ministers and parliamentarians who have projects that are funded by the TI, though there is no record of current high ranking government officials or direct relatives holding positions in the TI.

Section 94 of the Constitution states that leaders and public officials must not place themselves in positions in which they have or could have conflicts of interest or in which the fair exercise of their official duties might be compromised.

7. PREVENTIVE MEASURES

The current Tobacco Control Act does not have any provision to deal with industry interference. A comprehensive drafting instruction is underway to review the Act, undertaken by the MHMS. The initial drafting instruction submitted was recalled after realizing more needs to be done to strengthen its outlook. The MHMS recognized that the TI uses economic power, marketing and lobbying to discredit research and influence decision-makers to propagate the sale and distribution of tobacco products. The current review will make provision for inclusion of WHO FCTC Article 5.3 guidelines to be part of the structural formation of the Tobacco Control Act.

Recommendations

1. Re-launch and strengthen the Tobacco Control Technical Advisory Committee (TCTAC) as the core driver of all activities pertaining to tobacco control as well as in advising the MHMS Executive to advance tobacco control initiatives.
2. Enshrine prevention of TI interference as one of the priority agenda items for TCTAC work on it as soon as it is formalized by MHMS.
3. Raise awareness on WHO FCTC guidelines and recommendations, particularly Article 5.3 within the whole of government machinery, starting from the Office of the Prime Minister and the Caucus.
4. Conduct a thorough appraisal of the country's compliance with WHO FCTC Article 5.3. The findings of this report should provide useful information to stakeholders who take interest in tobacco control and industry interference.
5. Draft guidelines to prevent TI interference in public health policies.
6. Incorporate WHO FCTC Article 5.3 into the International Public Service Administration (IPAM) where all public servants take for progressive public service training.
7. Establish an overarching national standard guideline or code of conduct to uphold transparency when government officials interact with the TI. This must include records of all interactions, standards of conduct for dealing with the industry.
8. Prohibit and regulate TI contributions to politicians and public servants.
9. Prohibit all tobacco industry CSR donations, sponsorships and funding assistance.