

Malawi



SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

1. Industry Participation in Policy Development

Despite ratifying the WHO FCTC, Malawi still lacks a comprehensive tobacco control policy, resulting in weak and inconsistent enforcement. A February 2025 stakeholders' meeting marked modest progress, with no tobacco industry (TI) representatives present, indicating formal exclusion from health policy discussions.

However, government actions, especially through the Ministries of Agriculture and Trade, continue to promote the TI. This bias was evident in Malawi's delegation to COP10, which included officials supportive of tobacco's economic role. While not directly involved in policymaking, TI influence continues to shape national priorities indirectly.

2. Industry CSR Activities

Tobacco companies use corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives to strengthen their public presence and influence, often blurring the distinction between philanthropy and promotion. Firms such as Alliance One, PTML, BAT, and Limbe Leaf have launched initiatives in education, health, and environmental sustainability.

Alliance One spent over MWK 442 million between 2021 and 2023 on school infrastructure and maternal health, which was recognized by local officials. Limbe Leaf has focused on reforestation to address tobacco-related deforestation. While these programs provide tangible community benefits, they also raise concerns about the TI's growing social influence and potential conflicts with public health objectives.

3. Benefits to the Industry

Despite ratifying the WHO FCTC in August 2023, the government continues to prioritize economic interests over public health by heavily supporting the TI. The lack of formal tobacco control laws allows the TI to benefit from various incentives, including tax exemptions, export allowances, subsidies, and loans.

Government support is further highlighted by the President's annual role in launching the tobacco marketing season, demonstrating continued political support for the sector.

4. Unnecessary Interaction

The government maintains a close relationship with the TI that goes beyond regulatory needs, conflicting with WHO FCTC Article 5.3. High-ranking officials, including President Lazarus Chakwera, have publicly supported the industry, with events such as his 2024 meeting at Kamuzu Palace viewed as endorsements.

Ministers of Agriculture and other government bodies have also actively engaged in TI events, such as the 2023 Tobacco Leaf Integrity Conference. Law enforcement agencies collaborate with the TI in anti-smuggling operations, illustrating the use of state resources to support tobacco interests.

5. Transparency

Government interactions with the TI occur mainly through formal channels, particularly via the Tobacco Commission under the Tobacco Industry Act of 2019. While some high-level meetings are publicly disclosed, overall transparency is limited.



There is no formal policy requiring the disclosure of all engagements with the TI, and the Act does not mandate public access to meeting records. Although the government consults the TI during legislative processes, this is not carried out consistently or transparently. In addition, there is no requirement to register or disclose third-party actors such as lobbyists, further obscuring TI influence on policymaking.

6. Conflict of Interest

Malawi has no laws specifically prohibiting or requiring disclosure of political contributions from the TI. The Political Parties Act of 2018 restricts donations only from state-owned entities and does not mandate public disclosure of private contributions. The Tobacco Industry Act and election laws also lack provisions on political donations.

A major concern is the personal financial interests of some officials in tobacco farming, creating conflicts of interest that hinder effective tobacco control. Notably, some politicians have moved into TI roles after leaving office. The absence of conflict-of-interest regulations highlights the need for stronger governance safeguards.

7. Preventive Measures

Malawi has not established comprehensive safeguards to protect public health policies from TI influence, despite ratifying the WHO FCTC in 2023. The country has yet to implement Article 5.3 guidelines, and there is no formal system for disclosing government–TI interactions or monitoring conflicts of interest.

The general Code of Ethics does not address tobacco-related issues, and the Tobacco Commission lacks requirements for industry transparency, including data on production or lobbying. There are also no restrictions on gifts or contributions to officials, and no awareness programs on obligations under the WHO FCTC. These gaps leave Malawi vulnerable to TI interference and underscore the need for stronger preventive measures.

To align with the WHO FCTC, Madagascar must enforce strict laws prohibiting donations and lobbying by the TI. Policymakers need training to recognize and counter TI influence. Banning all tobacco advertising and empowering civil society to monitor TI interference are also important steps to protect public health from TI influence.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Develop and enact a comprehensive national tobacco control policy and regulatory framework.
2. Establish mandatory transparency protocols for government–TI interactions.
3. Adopt a tobacco-specific code of conduct for public officials.
4. Prohibit political contributions from the TI.
5. Mandate comprehensive industry reporting and implement public awareness programs.