

Covid-19 and Tobacco Control: Findings from a rapid response project

WRITTEN ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS FROM PARTICIPANTS

Question: Some rumours/studies claiming that tobacco smokers are less vulnerable to Covid-19. Are these claims backed by the industry? Is there any evidence indicating the involvement of the TI in such acts?

Answer: Professor Wakgari Deressa

Thank you. Evidence is still emerging but there is no credible evidence about this, but I don't think.

Question: Hello, smoking prevalence for many countries is usually higher in urban areas than in rural areas. Any explanation why it is higher in rural areas in case of Ethiopia? Like roll-your-own?

Answer: Professor Wakgari Deressa

Thank you. This is the findings we got from the GATS study in Ethiopia (2016). There might be different reasons for this. But the context in Ethiopia might be different.

Question: In South Africa the sale of tobacco and alcohol was banned for about 4 months. Some people quit smoking, but a large proportion of smokers turned to the illicit market (which was quite well established before the start of the lockdown). The price of cigarettes increased by an average of 250%. While we argued that the sales ban (and especially the extension of the sales ban since early May 2020) was misguided, the experience clearly illustrates that the government has much space to increase the excise tax.

Answer: Professor Ellis Owusu-Dabo

Dear Corne, I agree and therefore one must always keep an eye on the illicit trade area. It's important to look at all measures together and not just one while we measure the impact of specific interventions.

Question: The general experience from an economic perspective is that bans tend to enhance the illicit market. Would this not be the case for a shisha ban?

Answer: Professor Ellis Owusu-Dabo

The policy makers are keeping an eye on this and should not be considered as a case in isolation. We have to do so among other interventions please

Question: Dans le traitement de l'information y a-t-il eu des avis tendant à présenter le tabac comme pouvant lutter ou atténuer l'effet du coronavirus?

Answer: We did not pick this up from our participants please

Question: Could you elaborate on the finding that the Covid-19 had limited impact on the way TI operates in Ghana? Also, do you have any finding on the delivery of PPE and other Covid-19 prevention equipments by the TI in Ghana?

Answer: Professor Ellis Owusu-Dabo
Yes, will surely do. I hope i do get the chance to.

When it comes to PPE and COVID-19, government's intervention was superb although some health care facilities in rural areas had indicated that they were less accessible.

Question: Existe-t-il une entreprise de production de cigarettes au Ghana? si oui le volume de production dans la période Covid si elle fonctionnait?

Answer: Professor Ellis Owusu-Dabo
There is no manufacturing company in Ghana but there exists identifiable key marketing companies. The manufacturing is moved to Nigeria

Comments from Corne van Walbeek

To Ellis: so true. I am still of the strong opinion that an increase in the excise tax is a most effective means to reduce tobacco use. BUT it is important to keep illicit trade under control.

Answer: Professor Ellis Owusu-Dabo
Spot on, Corne!!! Totally agree

Question: With many trade and customs authorities now operating below full strength due to covid-19 and closure of borders, won't this act as a favorable ground for illicit tobacco trade and smuggling??

Answer: You are definitely right on this Cliff! I agree with you 100%

Question: How can stakeholders stimulate policy actors/governments to limit the use of tobacco and its products especially during the Covid-19 crisis? I am Jonathan-a Journalist from Arua-in Uganda

Answer: Ellis Owusu-Dabo

1. Roundtable discussion among stakeholders to reduce imports of tobacco products.
2. reinvigoration of tobacco control measures
3. Access to data to understand the dynamics of risk among tobacco users and smokers particularly.
4. Implementing the ideals of public health act and asking stakeholders to ramp this up!

Question: The Ugandan National Curriculum Development Centre (NCDC) is currently developing home schooling materials in different languages. I suggest we propose to the NCDC team to include critical messages on tobacco control in the home schooling materials.

Answer: Ms Kellen Nyamurungi

This is very good piece of work to integrate tobacco control

Question: Dr Owusu-Dabo, i want to know, exactly what is preventing Ghana from banning Shihsa use? There are reports that more youth are getting into it on daily basis

Answer:

The tobacco control industry and the goodwill of politicians. Implementation of ideals of the tobacco control act is happening but need to take it headon.

Need for resources is KEY as well as empowering the main stakeholders.

Information:

The briefings produced by this project can be accessed here:

<https://www.ed.ac.uk/usher/research/projects/covid-19-and-tobacco>
