

SALE OF SINGLE STICKS OF CIGARETTES IN AFRICA

Survey Report from 10 Capital Cities



ATCA

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- Environmental Rights Action (ERA), Nigeria
- Alliance Nationale des Consommateurs et de l'Environnement (ANCE), Togo
- Uganda National Health Consumers' Organisation (UNHCO), Uganda

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Introduction



Introduction

Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) working to stop the spread of the tobacco epidemic on the African continent have long expressed concern about the sale of single sticks of cigarettes “single sticks”. They worry that selling cigarettes in single sticks initiates the young and the poor into smoking and consequently worsens the tobacco epidemic which is already dire in Africa. To get a better understanding of the phenomenon of selling single sticks of cigarettes in the continent, the African Tobacco Control Alliance (ATCA), with support from the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids, partnered with CSOs to conduct a survey in 10 countries.

The CSOs sought to learn whether concern about single stick sales existed within government, how single stick cigarette sales and marketing mechanisms may be similar and different across the countries, and whether it was possible to detect common tobacco industry practices to support single stick sales.

This report which identifies British American Tobacco (BAT), Philip Morris International (PMI) and Imperial Brands as the main perpetrators of the sale of single sticks of cigarettes in Africa, highlights evidence of the existence of the phenomenon, and confirms that it is indeed problematic on the continent. It begins with an explanation of the project approach and methodology, and then presents findings. It concludes with a discussion on tobacco multinationals’ strategies in selling single sticks and recommendations on how to address the issue.



Togo - Lome: Minor selling single stick of cigarettes at the beach



Approach and Methodology

Approach and Methodology

For this study, a two-part approach to learning about single stick cigarette sales was employed:

- **desk research** conducted by ATCA centred on existing academic literature and media coverage of the issue; and,

- **primary data collection** conducted by partnering CSOs in 10 countries.

In light of limited resources to conduct data collection broadly within each country, the study focused on 10 capital cities:

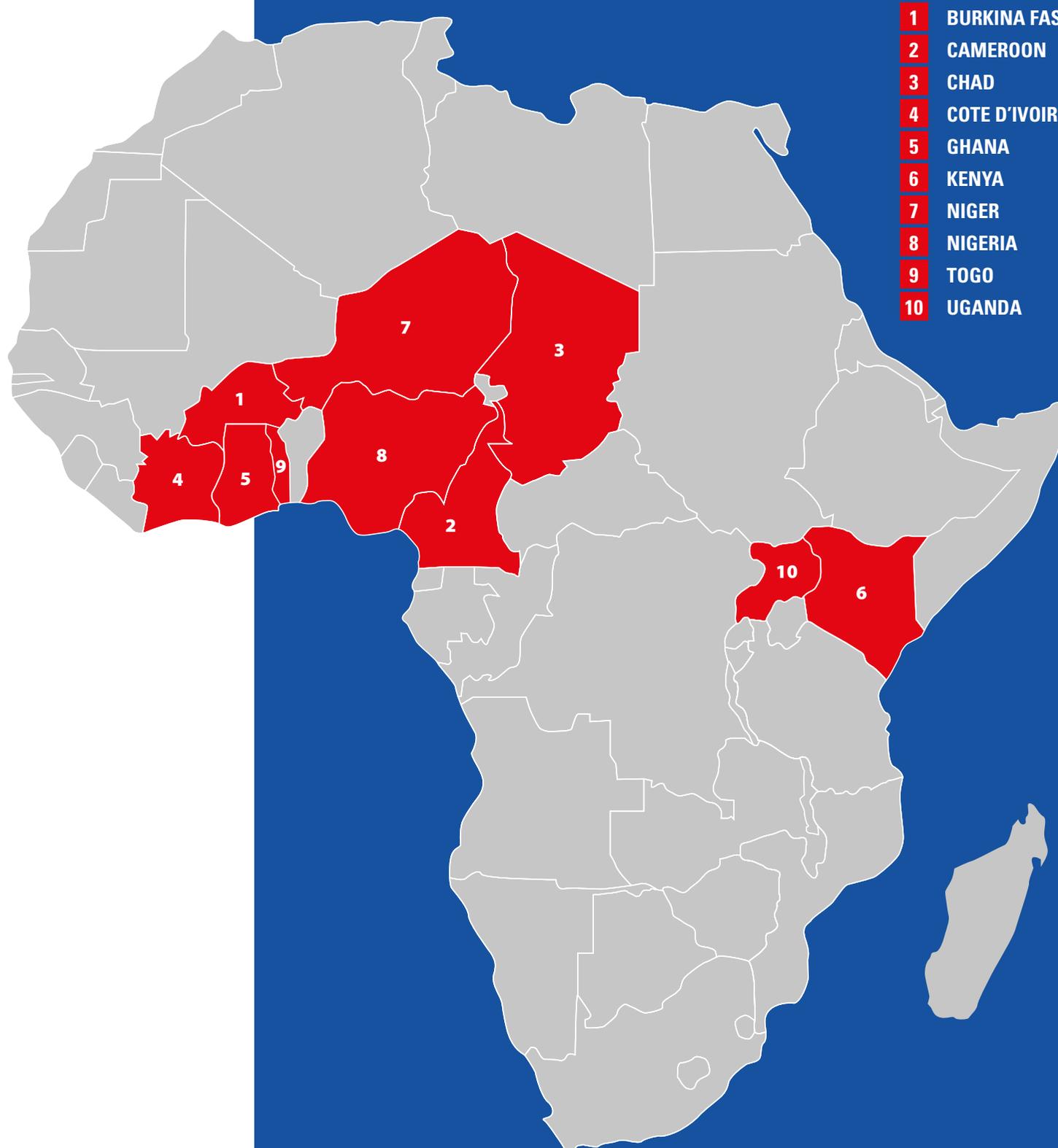
Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso), Yaoundé (Cameroon), Ndjamen (Chad), Abidjan (Cote d'Ivoire), Accra (Ghana), Nairobi (Kenya), Niamey (Niger), Lagos (Nigeria), Lomé (Togo), and Kampala (Uganda).

ATCA advised that data collection occurs around locations where young people congregate such as malls, shopping centres, movie theatres and game shops. Data collectors from each organization used three questionnaires to gather information about single stick cigarette sales:

1. Tobacco Control Focal Point semi-structured questionnaire for government officials
2. Tobacco Control Country Partner semi-structured questionnaire for affiliate advocacy organisations and Non-Governmental Organisations
3. Retailer semi-structured and observational survey questionnaire

The three questionnaires generated data from different sources to provide different perspectives on single stick availability in the countries participating in the study.

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Findings from Desk Research on Single Stick Cigarette Sales

Findings from Desk Research on Single Stick Cigarette Sales

Research literature on the phenomenon of single stick cigarettes sales is, overall, quite limited. However, one thing is clear; it is widespread in countries around the world, and especially in low- and middle-income countries.¹ Data from the Global Adult Tobacco Survey suggest that the Philippines, Bangladesh and India are the countries where single stick cigarette sales are the most abundant.² For the African continent specifically, research on single sticks is quite limited.

A survey carried out in Kenya in 2012 in the context of the International Tobacco Control Policy Evaluation (ITC) Project found that 64% of total sales were in stick form.³

Single stick cigarette sales are problematic for a variety of reasons. Single sticks are cheaper than a full pack of cigarettes and, consequently, make tobacco more affordable to youth and other individuals with limited resources.^{4,5} Researchers examining youth smoking in Argentina found that the purchase of single cigarettes

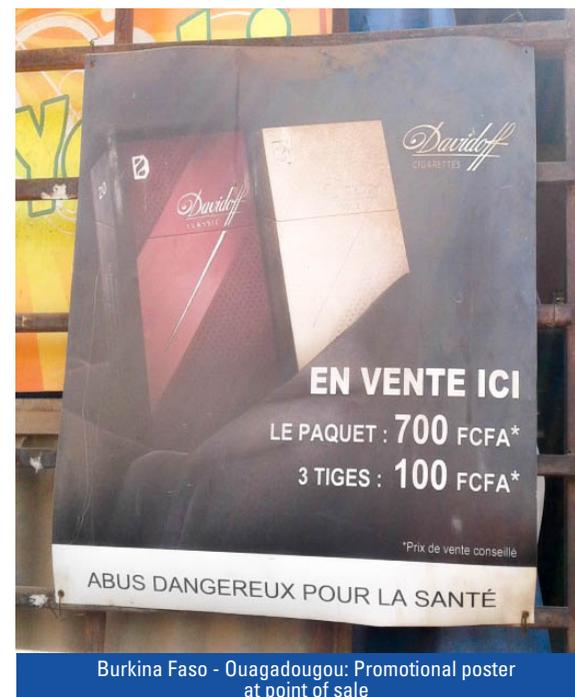
was more frequent among students from poor schools.⁶

Single stick cigarette sales facilitate experimentation among youth who have not yet become regular smokers.⁷ The sale of single sticks also undermines existing effective tobacco control policies by limiting an individual's exposure to health warning labels and lessening the impact of tobacco tax increases on cigarette packs.⁸ Where single sticks cigarette sales are prohibited, such sales constitute a form of illicit trade. Lastly, single stick sales undermine smokers' efforts to quit by not only making the product easily accessible but also by serving as a cue for smoking, promoting relapse.⁹ One study conducted in Mexico found that smokers who experience more frequent cravings to smoke because of seeing single cigarettes for sale, are less likely to intend to quit when compared to



Burkina Faso - Ouagadougou: Sale of single stick of cigarettes near basketball playground

tobacco tax increases on cigarette packs.⁸ Where single sticks cigarette sales are prohibited, such sales constitute a form of illicit trade. Lastly, single stick sales undermine smokers' efforts to quit by not only making the product easily accessible but also by serving as a cue for smoking, promoting relapse.⁹ One study conducted in Mexico found that smokers who experience more frequent cravings to smoke because of seeing single cigarettes for sale, are less likely to intend to quit when compared to



Burkina Faso - Ouagadougou: Promotional poster at point of sale

smokers who do not experience such cues or cravings.¹⁰

A study based on the availability of single sticks in California found that minor's access to single cigarettes increased with age. In addition, retailers were more likely to sell single sticks to youth in less affluent neighbourhoods with a majority of minority residents, compared to youth in white middle-class neighborhoods.¹¹

Single stick sales can be more profitable for retailers than selling whole packs. One study found that retailers can "markup" or charge more for single sticks than what the stick is actually worth, based on the price of the pack.¹²

Putting profits aside, the absence of laws regarding cigarette sales and/or the lack of enforcement of laws banning single stick sales are the likely primary reasons why retailers choose to sell them.^{13,14,15}

Youth in general and poorer youth specifically would not otherwise be able to purchase tobacco, and retailers, anticipating no negative consequences, prioritize sales over other factors.

And, while tobacco companies such as British American Tobacco (BAT), may claim they do not support the sale of single stick cigarettes or any tobacco product to youth, reports note evidence of BAT providing sponsorship for music events and parties, specifically targeting the youth.^{16,17}

For example, an internal British American Tobacco marketing proposal released in a U.S. litigation settlement entitled, "LDC (Less Developed Counties) Project" called for individually heat-sealed cigarettes designed to lengthen the shelf life of stick cigarettes in arid climates found in Africa and the Middle East.¹⁸

An internal audiocassette recording of the conference captured with clarity the consumers targeted by the proposed stick sales.

"...[T]he brand image must be enhanced by the new packaging [of the stick sales]...if you just say, this is a cheap cigarette for you dirt poor little black farmers...they're not going to go for it...I have not gone into psychographics...I have no idea what the psychographics of the average black farmer is."¹⁹



Findings from Primary Data Collection

Findings from Primary Data Collection

Tobacco Control Focal Point Interviews

The Tobacco Control focal points (officials designated specifically to work on, and serve as reference for tobacco control) working in government, and representatives of civil society organisations interviewed for this study agreed that there was enough circumstantial evidence of single stick sales and promotion in their countries to warrant further research on the phenomenon. This was true even though seven of the countries included in the study have laws that ban the sale of single sticks: Burkina Faso, Ghana, Kenya, Niger, Nigeria, Togo, and Uganda.

Tobacco Control focal points based in countries where single stick sales are banned believed that the pervasiveness of sales is due to several factors:

- lack of awareness among retailers about the existence of the law;
- lack of enforcement by the designated authority;
- lack of capacity (e.g., knowledge of the law, training, and staff availability); and
- lack of prioritization on enforcement.

In addition, interviewees noted that youth have access to single sticks of cigarettes from traditional venues such as tobacco retailers. One interviewee from Ghana recalled having heard that the “tobacco companies visit junior high schools during their graduation get together to offer them free unbranded cigarettes”.

A number of interviewees also noted that single stick advertising is a problem with posters that advertise the low price of a single stick.

The focal points in some countries believed that retailers sell cigarettes in single sticks because no one, including their tobacco suppliers, informs them about the regulations for selling these products. Even if they are aware, they take advantage of the lax enforcement. A few interviewees discussed the availability of single sticks noting that youth have access to them at music concerts and smoking parties where tobacco companies distribute free

cigarettes. In addition, interviewees noted that youth have access to single sticks of cigarettes from traditional venues such as tobacco retailers. One interviewee from Ghana recalled having



Retailer Interviews & Observations

With guidance from ATCA, a variety of tobacco retailers were visited: grocery stores, temporary and permanent kiosks, street vendors, bars and restaurants.

Based on the retailer questionnaire and observations by data collectors, the following conclusions were drawn:

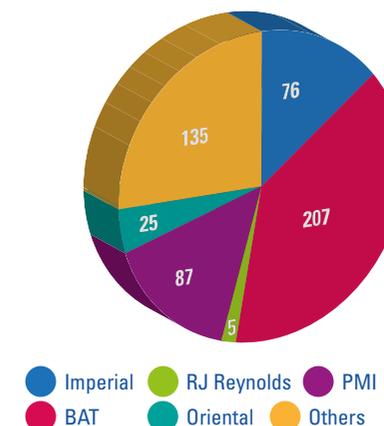
- In every capital city covered by the survey, it was possible to purchase cigarettes in single sticks.
- Single sticks were made available for purchase when retailers intentionally opened a full pack of cigarettes to sell individual sticks.
- Single sticks were available from cigarette brands owned by British American Tobacco (BAT), Philip Morris International (PMI) and Imperial Brands.

Civil Society Organization Representative Interviews

The CSO representatives interviewed for this study expressed similar sentiments to those of government tobacco control focal points; namely that many retailers are likely unaware of bans on single stick sales where they exist, and that there is little to no enforcement of bans. They also noted that single sticks are sold in their countries in a variety of settings including grocery stores, kiosks, street vendors, bars, restaurants, and supermarkets in addition to discotheques, cine clubs, beaches, public pools, market squares and school compounds.

CSO interviewees also discussed the advertising and promotional channels used to market single sticks, explaining that they are often exhibited on the counter with open packs and/or posters, or in some instances, they are given away for free at events or parties.

Figure I. Figure I shows that from a sample of 78 retailers visited, up to 530 cigarette open packs were observed.



Among the multinational cigarette brands available for sale as single sticks, the most common were Benson & Hedges produced by BAT, Marlboro produced by PMI and Davidoff produced by Imperial Tobacco.

Of the tobacco retailers observed, Uganda had the most open cigarette packs followed by Togo and Nigeria. The sale of single sticks is prohibited in all these countries.

- Single sticks from Philip Morris International cigarette brands were observed in over half of the capital cities: Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso), Yaoundé (Cameroon), Abidjan (Cote d'Ivoire), Niamey (Niger), Ndjamená (Chad), Lagos (Nigeria), Lomé (Togo).

-Single sticks from British American Tobacco cigarette brands were observed in 9 out of 10 capital cities: Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso), Yaoundé (Cameroon), Ndjamená (Chad), Abidjan (Cote d'Ivoire), Accra (Ghana), Nairobi (Kenya), Niamey (Niger), Lagos (Nigeria), and Kampala (Uganda).

One type of promotional material specifically linked to single sticks was posters that advertise the price of single sticks of cigarettes.

It is typical for retailers to receive many free promotional materials, some of them highlighting the sale of single sticks of cigarettes. Among the items given to retailers are: umbrellas, t-shirts, ashtrays, towels, lighters, fans, and pens.



Uganda - Kampala: Poster advertising sale of single sticks at point of sale

Promotion of single stick sale by British American Tobacco (BAT) included a “buy one, get one free” campaign and printing and distribution of posters to retailers advertising the price of a single cigarette in Cote d'Ivoire and Cameroon. In both of these countries, it was reported that the tobacco industry funded an advertising campaign that promoted the sale of single sticks at a “special price,” 3 sticks for 100 CFA francs (USD \$0.17).



Sale of Single Sticks of Cigarettes in Africa



Single Stick Special Promotion Posters





- 1 UGANDA**
- 2 COTE D'IVOIRE**
- 3 KENYA**
- 4 CHAD**



Cote d'Ivoire - Abidjan: Tobacco stand for the sale of single sticks of cigarettes

Discussion

Discussion

It is clear that single sticks are readily available, sold and consumed in all 10 capital cities included in this study. Exacerbating the problem is tobacco advertising that is usually present where single sticks are sold given the absence of comprehensive tobacco advertising bans.

The availability of single sticks allows individuals with few resources, such as youth, to buy tobacco products. In addition, the fact that single sticks are widely available and promoted underscores the concern that they are considered a common item available for sale, and that single stick sales normalize smoking which is a dangerous addictive behaviour that can result in death. It is important to note that BAT and PMI supply free promotional materials to tobacco retailers in order to create brand recognition and encourage individuals to buy their products.



Uganda - Kampala: Tobacco stand that has open packs with cigarettes for sale



Kenya - Nairobi: Tobacco stand with promotional material for sale of single stick

Any single stick promotional material and advertisement further supports other existing tobacco advertising present at a retail outlet.

Observations that single sticks from cigarette brands owned by PMI and BAT were being sold in many capital cities is not a coincidence. PMI's Marlboro is the most sold cigarette brand in the world.²⁰

Recommendations

Recommendations

The WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) is the world's first and only public health treaty. Ratified by 180 Parties, the Treaty identifies evidence-based measures to prevent and reduce tobacco use. Considering the gravity of this report's findings, ATCA and its in-country partners propose the following recommendations in order to address the availability of single sticks of cigarettes.

- In line with Article 16 of the FCTC, Parties should ensure that the sale of single sticks or small packs of tobacco products is prohibited by passing and enforcing appropriate legislation.²¹
- In line with Article 13 of the FCTC, Parties should comprehensively ban all forms of tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship and this should include any advertising or promotional materials related to single sticks.²²
- In line with Article 15 of the FCTC, Parties should consider additional provisions such as licensing of retail vendors of tobacco products to control the sale of single sticks. Failure to obey the law could result in a range of sanctions; from fines and penalties to license suspension or revocation.²³

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