



Tobacco Control
Data Initiative

Curtailing Tobacco Industry Interference to Save Public Health Policy in Zambia

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Executive Summary

Zambia has witnessed a significant decline in tobacco control effort, as revealed by the recently published 2025 Tobacco Industry Interference (TI) index, as the score rose sharply from 77 in 2023 to 83 in 2025. This is a marked retrogression from the marginal progress made in 2023 as the TII index dropped from 78 in 2021 to 77. This decline is attributable to the persistent delay in passing the Tobacco Control Bill due to the consistent interference and influence of the tobacco industry. For over ten years, the tobacco industry has interfered in the Tobacco and Nicotine Control Bill that was first introduced in 2018 and again in 2025, while taking advantage of government support, easy access to officials, and unregulated corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities. This brief highlights the main tactics used by the tobacco industry in Zambia, dispels common industry myths with evidence, and provides targeted, practical policy measures to align Zambia with Article 5.3 of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC).

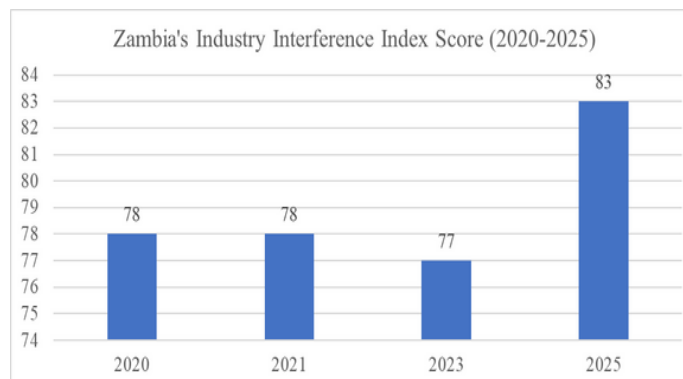
Zambia's Performance Across Industry Interference Index Subcomponents

The WHO FCTC obliges Parties to protect public health policy from the commercial and vested interests of the tobacco industry. The current ranking and documented practices of Zambia indicate a lack of effective adherence to Article 5.3 and its guidelines. Apart from worsening overall performance in 2025, Zambia performed poorly in most of the components used to track the overall tobacco industrial interference as discussed below.

- **Tobacco Industry participation in policy development:** The Tobacco Industry (TI) participates in tobacco policy discussions. For instance, after the Tobacco Control Bill was tabled before Parliament, consultations on the bill were delayed due to influence from the Ministry of Commerce, Trade and Industry, the Zambian Private Sector, manufacturers' associations, farmers' unions, and the business council. These groups argued that passing the bill would lead to job losses and harm the economy. As a result, Zambia scored 15 out of 20 for industry participation in policy development in 2025, indicating a high level of tobacco industry interference in tobacco control and public health policymaking.
- **Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR):** Under the guise of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), the tobacco industry continues to exert influence on the tobacco control policy. In some cases, the Zambian government has even welcomed certain CSR initiatives, inadvertently providing the industry with greater access to policymakers.
- **Benefits to the tobacco industry:** Government officials sometimes provide assistance or support, such as incentive grants, tax breaks, or subsidies that favour the industry. In 2024, the Ministry of Commerce, Trade, and Industry publicly supported the tobacco industry. In Zambia, TI is permitted unrestricted advertising, marketing and sales of tobacco products, including new smoking and vaping devices. Products are also allowed to be sold near educational facilities, such as schools, colleges, and universities. This benefits TI by expanding its sales among vulnerable groups. The argument from the ministry is that there is no need to kill the industry, emphasising economic benefits.
- **Unnecessary interactions:** In some cases, government officials and the tobacco industry do organise meetings, which suggests a high level of interaction between them. In the 2025 TII Index, this level of interaction resulted in a high score (11 out of 20) for the relationship between government officials and the tobacco industry.



- **Transparency:** Because of the absence of a tobacco control law, there is no procedure in place to declare or disclose meetings or interactions between government officials and the tobacco industry. As a result, meetings occur without registration or any official documentation outlining their purpose between the two parties. Consequently, Zambia received a score of 10 out of 10 for the transparency component of the industry interference in 2025.
- **Conflict of interest:** Because tobacco industry operations, interactions, and meetings with government officials lack transparency, conflicts of interest are often unavoidable. Although there is no law prohibiting government officials from receiving gifts from the tobacco industry, the potential for conflicts of interest remains moderate, based on the conflict of interest score in the global tobacco industry interference, which stood at 7 out of 15 in 2025.
- **Preventive measures:** Due to the pending passage of the tobacco control bill into law, there is no code of conduct that shapes the relationship between government officials and the tobacco industry. Therefore, there are no preventive measures in place to define the rules of engagement between government officials and the tobacco industry. Hence, the country ranked 25 out of 30 in TII Index 2025.



Tobacco industry interference tactics observed in Zambia

The industry uses a familiar playbook to delay and weaken regulation. Key tactics documented in Zambia include:



Receiving benefits or incentives:

Tobacco companies such as British American Tobacco (BAT), which operates in designated economic zones such as the Multi-facility Economic Zone, have received incentives that benefit the industry but significantly reduce tax revenue for the government. The Tobacco Excise Tax Simulation Model (TETSIM) estimates that Zambia lost around 1.7 billion ZMW in revenue between 2015 and 2022



Interference in policy development:

The Tobacco Control Bill's legislative process has been stalled repeatedly since 2010; institutions and laws intended to promote business (e.g., the Business Regulatory Review Agency, 2014) have been leveraged to slow tobacco regulation. For instance, in March 2025, the cabinet suddenly postponed the Tobacco Control Bill for further consultations to finalise the bill. This decision was reportedly influenced by the Ministry of Commerce, Trade and Industry and tobacco industry allies under the Zambia Private Sector Alliance. These organisations, including manufacturers, farmers' unions, and business councils, claimed that if the bill is passed as it is, it will lead to job losses, trade, and eventually damage the economy. Also, the Chipangali Council Chairperson, who represents a significant tobacco-growing region, publicly rejected the Bill, citing potential adverse effects on the economy and producers in the region.



Use of front groups:

Industry-aligned organisations, including the Tobacco Board of Zambia (TBZ), mobilise opposition, influence farmer narratives, and sponsor processes that favour industry-friendly laws.



Unnecessary interactions with officials:

High-level meetings and workshops by senior government officials and the tobacco industry normalise industry interference and create political leverage that goes beyond necessary regulatory contacts.



CSR as promotion:

Companies use CSR – donations of laptops, community projects, scholarships – to build goodwill and political capital; an example is JTI’s January 2020 donation of laptops (~ZMW104,000) to a constituency school.



Conflicts of interest:

State-controlled funds hold equity in the tobacco industry. For instance, the National Pension Scheme Authority (NAPSA) and the Public Service Pension Fund (PSPF) own shares in British American Tobacco Zambia Ltd (3.01% and 3.77%, respectively), creating direct financial conflicts with public health policy obligations.

Policy recommendations

—*Tackling Industry Interference.*

1. Enact and implement the Tobacco and Nicotine Control Bill: Enacting comprehensive legislation that aligns with WHO FCTC Article 5.3 is the most effective single step to limit TI influence and protect public health.
2. Ban on Tobacco Industry CSR and promotional activities: Make prohibiting CSR explicit in law and enforce penalties for violations; this will lead to public denormalisation of industry “charity”.
3. Prohibit industry incentives and preferential treatment: Revoke or restrict tax breaks, subsidies, or special economic zone privileges for tobacco companies.
4. Adopt a mandatory code of conduct for public officials: Officials should be mandated to refuse meetings with the tobacco industry except when strictly necessary for regulation. In such cases, it will mandate prior public notice, agendas, and published minutes.
5. Create a public transparency registry: Publicly record and publish all meetings, communications, submissions, contracts and benefits exchanged between government entities and the tobacco industry.
6. Address conflicts of interest and divestment: The government should reduce the conflict of interest by prohibiting state institutions and pension funds from investing in the tobacco industry holdings or implement a transparent management policy that aligns with public health goals.
7. Raise awareness across government and parastatals: Considering the gap in knowledge and awareness of the tactics and influence of Tobacco Control, it has become imperative that the government should urgently conduct national training and sensitisation on WHO FCTC Article 5.3 obligations for ministries (Agriculture, Finance, Trade, Labour, Health) and state agencies.
8. Strengthen Civil Society monitoring. CSO capacity to monitor interference, file complaints, and litigate when necessary should be strengthened through targeted capacity building. It is equally necessary to establish whistleblower protections for officials who report undue tobacco industry influence.
9. Public communications and counter-messaging. The government of Zambia should launch evidence-based campaigns to correct industry misinformation about jobs, illicit trade, and farmer welfare. Also, the use of independent economic and health research is considered critical to inform debate.

Conclusion

Zambia’s high interference score and decade-long stall in passing comprehensive tobacco control legislation reflect systemic vulnerabilities to tobacco industry influence. By passing the Tobacco and Nicotine Control Bill, banning CSR and incentives, mandating transparency, and getting rid of financial conflicts of interest, Zambia will protect public health policy and meet its WHO FCTC obligations. Civil society, health sector and government actors will be crucial partners in implementing these measures and ensuring that policy decisions serve Zambians’ health rather than corporate interests.

For more information visit:

<https://zambia.tobaccocontroldata.org/en/home/industry-interference/>