



OPEN ACCESS

# Tobacco industry corporate social responsibility activities and other interference after ratification of a strong tobacco law in Ethiopia

Sisay Derso Mengesha <sup>1</sup>, Claire Brolan,<sup>2</sup> Coral E Gartner <sup>2</sup>

► Additional supplemental material is published online only. To view, please visit the journal online (<http://dx.doi.org/10.1136/tc-2023-058079>).

<sup>1</sup>Environmental Health and Noninfectious Disease, Ethiopian Public Health Institute, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia  
<sup>2</sup>School of Public Health, University of Queensland, Herston, Queensland, Australia

## Correspondence to

Mr Sisay Derso Mengesha, Environmental Health and Noninfectious disease, Ethiopian Public Health Institute, Addis Ababa 1165, Ethiopia; [sisdres23@yahoo.com](mailto:sisdres23@yahoo.com)

Received 27 March 2023  
Accepted 31 August 2023

## ABSTRACT

**Background** Since strict new tobacco control laws were introduced in 2019 and 2020, the National Tobacco Enterprise (NTE), the main manufacturer and distributor of cigarettes in Ethiopia, strategically engaged in corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities and other tactics to interfere in tobacco control policymaking. This study systematically identified and reviewed tobacco industry activities that undermine Ethiopia's strict new tobacco control laws.

**Methods** We collated, reviewed and analysed evidence on tobacco industry CSR activities from February 2019 to November 2022 in Ethiopia, including newspapers, organisational websites, social media and government documents related to tobacco industry activities, contract agreements and other policy interference attempts.

**Results** NTE's CSR activities included: (1) Funding educational programmes (eg, postgraduate scholarships); (2) Community service (eg, donating COVID-19 prevention materials, providing water, sanitation and hygiene supplies); and (3) Supporting government programmes (eg, greening initiatives and training programmes). NTE facilitated CSR activities via a contract agreement with the Ethiopian government that was created when Japan Tobacco International purchased the Government's majority share in NTE. NTE subsequently partnered with the Japanese Embassy in Addis Ababa and private law firms on CSR activities. The tobacco control community stopped NTE distributing free COVID-19 prevention products in Addis Ababa but had limited impact on other identified breaches of laws prohibiting tobacco advertising promotion and sponsorship.

**Conclusion** The new laws have not stopped NTE using multiple CSR activities to interfere in tobacco control policy. Regular monitoring of tobacco industry CSR activities to identify potential breaches is recommended. Moreover, the Ethiopian government should revise its contractual agreement with NTE to end NTE's participation in law-making processes and partnerships on illicit tobacco control.

## INTRODUCTION

Ethiopia's National Tobacco Enterprise (NTE) was established in 1942 by Proclamation No. 30/1942 as Ethiopia's tobacco monopoly organisation.<sup>1</sup> NTE remains the only tobacco company that operates, manufactures, imports and distributes tobacco products in and across the country. In 2017, the Ethiopian government privatised its NTE share to Japan Tobacco International (JTI) for US\$1 billion,

## WHAT IS ALREADY KNOWN ON THIS TOPIC

- ⇒ It is well documented that in all global regions, the tobacco industry (TI) interferes in public health policy for financial gain and expansion of their commercial activities.
- ⇒ One major way the TI seeks to favourably influence a country's public health policy and regulatory decision-makers is through corporate social responsibility (CSR) tactics and initiatives.
- ⇒ During the height of the COVID-19 pandemic crisis, TI interference through CSR activities to support both public and private public health emergency responses occurred in many countries.
- ⇒ There has been limited research on TI interference in Ethiopia, and no published evaluation of CSR activities by the TI after tobacco control law was enacted in February 2019 to ban such activities.

## WHAT THIS STUDY ADDS

- ⇒ This is the first study to review publicly available information and government internal documents that were exchanged with the TI to identify and describe the types of CSR activities and mode of interference in public health policymaking and regulatory initiatives after TI CSR activities were banned in Ethiopia in February 2019.
- ⇒ The study identified key TI front groups and partners, and strategies that were used by the TI to present itself as a 'good corporate citizen' and to engage in unnecessary interaction with the government.
- ⇒ Our findings provide important knowledge of the profile of TI front groups such as law firms and tobacco farmers.
- ⇒ The study findings provide new insights for policymakers to protect public health laws from the activities of the TI.

## HOW THIS STUDY MIGHT AFFECT RESEARCH, PRACTICE OR POLICY

- ⇒ Our results indicated that CSR activities were used by the TI to gain influence, meddle in life-saving health policies and secure preferential treatment from government organisations.
- ⇒ Such evidence calls for increased protection of public health laws from financial interests posed by the TI not only in Ethiopia but across Africa and globally.



© Author(s) (or their employer(s)) 2023. Re-use permitted under CC BY. Published by BMJ.

**To cite:** Mengesha SD, Brolan C, Gartner CE. *Tob Control* Epub ahead of print: [please include Day Month Year]. doi:10.1136/tc-2023-058079

the most significant purchase in Ethiopia's privatisation history. Today, NTE is owned by two entities: JTI (71% share) and Yemen-based Sheba Company (29% share).<sup>2</sup> JTI will control NTE's monopoly rights until 2025 with an option to renew this agreement in the contract. On the one hand, the Ethiopian government's withdrawal from NTE demonstrates its commitment to the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO FCTC) following government ratification of that Convention in January 2014.<sup>3</sup> However, financial challenges and a domestic uprising in some parts of the country may also have motivated the decision to sell NTE.<sup>4</sup>

Article 5.3 of the WHO FCTC states 'In setting and implementing their public health policies with respect to tobacco control, Parties shall act to protect these policies from commercial and other vested interests of the tobacco industry in accordance with national law'. Article 5.3 empowers governments to protect themselves from tobacco industry (TI) tactics, such as the use of corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities.<sup>5</sup> Tobacco companies have historically used CSR to not only remediate their public image, but also to gain access to policymakers and thereby influence public health policy.<sup>6</sup> The Ethiopian government passed a series of tobacco control laws in 2019 and 2020 (Proclamation No. 1112/2019 and Excise Tax Proclamation No. 1186/2020) in line with its WHO FCTC obligations that included a total ban on TI CSR activities, such as prohibiting individuals with TI connections from participating in tobacco control training, and prohibiting government organisations from receiving any financial or in-kind support from the TI, along with smoke-free public places, graphic pack health warnings, a total ban on tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship (including at point of sale), and prohibition of sale to and by minors under 21 years of age.<sup>7-9</sup>

Importantly, Proclamation No. 112/2019 prohibits TI interference in government activities by stating that interaction between the TI and health policymakers 'shall be limited to only those strictly necessary for effective regulation of the tobacco industry or tobacco products'. Proclamation No. 1112/2019 further states that 'any person who prepares, publishes, transmits, or participates in the illegal or unauthorised advertisement or promotion of tobacco products should be punished by imprisonment not exceeding three years and/or with a fine not less than fifty thousand Birr (~USD\$900)'.<sup>7</sup> In terms of Excise Tax Proclamation No. 1186/2020 introduced in February 2020, Ethiopia's new tobacco excise law aims to achieve a mixed-excise system for cigarettes consistent with WHO recommendations. The reform applied a 30% tax rate on the retail price of cigarettes and a specific excise rate of Ethiopian Birr (ETB) 8 on each pack (or US\$0.25 at February 2020's exchange rate). The Ministry of Finance is authorised to increase the tobacco tax by 10% each year without seeking authorisation from Ethiopia's Council of Ministers.<sup>10</sup>

Despite these strong legal measures by the Ethiopian government, the threat of TI interference remains and the 2020 and 2021 Global Tobacco Industry Interference Index Reports for Ethiopia highlight several ways the TI has interfered in policymaking in Ethiopia.<sup>11-13</sup> TI interference most often occurs where there is limited understanding of tobacco control provisions and engagement in tobacco control activities beyond health agencies, and limited authority for coordination mechanisms among regional state and national governments.<sup>14-16</sup> Conflicts of interest at personal and institutional levels among health and non-health agencies can also be barriers to minimising industry interference.<sup>17</sup> The TI further obstructs government-led tobacco control efforts through various CSR-related

tactics and strategies. For instance, to obstruct the passage of Proclamations No. 1112/2019 and No. 1186/2020, Ethiopia's TI promoted its 'good' corporate citizenry as a significant taxpayer and employer.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, when the Proclamations were in draft form and under public discussion, NTE unsuccessfully used tobacco growers and members of the Addis Ababa Chamber of Commerce to form antitobacco control law alliances at public hearings.<sup>18</sup> Such protobacco lobbyists attempted to rebuild NTE's reputation as a platform for voluntary regulation and as a source of trustworthy information.<sup>6</sup>

The TI's strategic use of CSR activities to interfere in tobacco-control laws in Ethiopia is consistent with Big Tobacco's leveraging of CSR initiatives globally.<sup>19</sup> For example, the African Tobacco Control Alliance describes several TI CSR activities across African countries, including a poverty alleviation programme in Tanzania, the construction of a community drinking water facility in Burkina Faso, US\$1.2 million in funding to address child labour and strengthen children's rights in Mozambique, and financial support for a local rugby team in South Africa (among other activities).<sup>20</sup> Further studies have also described TI CSR activity in low-income and middle-income countries in the Asian region.<sup>21</sup> However, how Ethiopia's TI has leveraged CSR narratives since Proclamations No. 1112/2019 and No. 1186/2020 were implemented has not been systematically examined. Therefore, this study aims to identify and document TI CSR activities in contravention of Ethiopia's new tobacco control laws. To systematically explore this topic in the Ethiopian context postlaw implementation, we systematically reviewed publicly available evidence to identify TI CSR activities after 2019 to document TI image-building and self-promotion, as well as TI interaction with government bodies. As no publicly accessible repository exists mapping TI interference in Ethiopia's tobacco-control policymaking (in contravention to Ethiopia's new tobacco control laws), our findings may advance understanding and countering of TI interference in tobacco control policymaking processes not only in Ethiopia but elsewhere.

## METHODS

We aimed to identify and review any CSR activities by the TI in Ethiopia since 2019 in contravention of Article 51 of the Ethiopian Food and Drug Authority (EFDA) Proclamation No. 112/2019. We searched online databases using the Google search engine and social media platforms such as Twitter, as well as Telegram for tobacco control-related media stories (Ethiopian and African newspaper websites) for occurrences of TI CSR-related interaction with Ethiopian government agencies and representatives. Key search terms included 'Ethiopia', 'Tobacco Control', 'Framework Convention on Tobacco Control', 'FCTC', 'World Health Organization Framework Convention on Tobacco Control', 'WHO FCTC implementation', 'Tobacco Industry', 'industry interference', 'JTI' and 'National Tobacco Enterprise'. The search terms were customised for each data source to retrieve published articles and policy documents in Ethiopia from February 2019 until November 2022. Documents were included if they described any TI CSR activity in Ethiopia since the adoption of Proclamation No. 1112/2019 (February 2019). The search of newspaper articles, social media posts and government internal reports from all sources produced 47 results, of which 31 remained after duplicates were removed and these were included in the full-text review (see online supplemental table 1).

To strengthen the search, key public institutions that interact with NTE and have tobacco control regulatory functions were

contacted by letter, email and telephone. These were the EFDA (tobacco regulatory body) and the Customs Commission (who signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with NTE to fight contraband cigarettes). We requested any correspondence or documents exchanged between these government agencies with the TI that are on the public record but not available online. In addition, we approached a leading tobacco control advocacy civil society organisation (CSO), Mathiwos Wondu Ye-Ethiopia Cancer Society (MWECS) as a key informant on TI CSR-related activities and tobacco control community responses for the CSR activities that we identified in the data. We asked MWECS to provide details of TI CSR activities within the time period of study interest. Overall, 11 documents were obtained from the three organisations, including the NTE privatisation contract agreement document, NTE letters from the Prime Minister's Office, minute records between EFDA and NTE, email exchanges between TI and EFDA, a letter to the Japanese Embassy in Addis Ababa from CSOs, and others.

Relevant information identified from the on-line and off-line searches, as well as contextual discussions with MWECS, were subsequently entered into tables, with the first author (SDM) leading the thematic analysis of the qualitative data guided by Braun and Clarke's original framework for thematic analysis.<sup>22</sup> The thematic analysis was an iterative process, involving SDM becoming familiar with the data by reading and re-reading the material, as well as developing and revising the thematic codes.

## RESULTS

Three main themes were identified in the data:

1. TI's CSR initiatives since the passing of Proclamations No. 1112/2019 and No. 1186/2020.
2. Questionable interaction between the TI and official government agencies.
3. Countermeasures against TI interference.

### Theme 1: TI CSR activities since the passing of proclamations No. 1112/2019 and No. 1186/2020

NTE, via its major shareholder, JTI, has engaged in CSR activities including providing university scholarships for Ethiopian students and community water supply and sanitation services (table 1). For instance, the Japanese Embassy in Addis Ababa and JTI entered into a MOU on 21 May 2021 to collaboratively provide postgraduate scholarships to Ethiopian students to study in Japan (online supplemental table 1).<sup>23–26</sup> The MOU was signed by the Japanese Ambassador and a JTI representative and promoted as building a mutually beneficial bridge between Japan

and Ethiopia. JTI representatives committed to ongoing financial contributions to the scholarship programme.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, JTI announced via Twitter CSR activities related to providing safe water and improved sanitation services for Ethiopian households, without providing details of the location/communities supplied.<sup>27</sup>

NTE capitalised on the COVID-19 pandemic in Ethiopia, which commenced in March 2020 when the first case was reported in Addis Ababa.<sup>28</sup> NTE produced hand sanitiser and distributed it without charge to disadvantaged groups in Lideta subcity in Addis Ababa.<sup>29</sup> NTE's head office and factories were located in Lideta at that time, which was among the subcities with the highest recorded numbers of confirmed positive COVID-19 cases.<sup>30</sup>

We identified TI CSR activities connected to the Ethiopian Government's National Greening Initiative. In July 2019, Ethiopia's prime minister launched a nationwide four billion tree planting project at Adwa Park in Addis Ababa. At the launch, the prime minister was accompanied by NTE employees who planted over 2000 trees. As part of the National Greening Initiative, NTE further participated in tree planting as part of the country's national reforestation campaign with seven corporate clients of the Mehrteab Leul & Associates Law Office. This law firm reported that its clients see the initiative as a 'good opportunity' to discharge their CSR responsibilities.<sup>31</sup> On 26 July 2019, Ethiopian Television, the national television broadcaster, broadcasted and promoted the law firm initiative and NTE partnership.<sup>32</sup> During the press conference, NTE's corporate affairs and communication director emphasised that the company would plant over 2000 seedlings on Ethiopia's Green Legacy Day (29 July 2019) and would support the government's green policies by discharging its CSR obligations.<sup>32 33</sup> Overall, NTE reported nearly 4000 saplings as part of the Green Legacy programme.

Additionally, we found that Ethiopia's TI invests in training government workers, including Customs Commission staff, and members of the police and army, on controlling illicit tobacco trade. Email communication between NTE and a branch of the Customs Commission, following an NTE Customs Commission site visit, indicates this training is based on an active, in-place agreement. Three days of training were scheduled at the government Customs Commission branch office in Dire Dawa following the visit.<sup>33</sup>

In June 2020, NTE members published an article about NTE contributions to the 'Tobacco Production Practice of Smallholders' on tobacco farms in Bilate, Wolaita and Hawassa.<sup>34</sup> The article highlighted how NTE supports these smallholder farmers

**Table 1** List of CSR activities carried out by National Tobacco Enterprise (NTE) since the passage of Proclamation No. 1112/2019

Type of CSR-related support from NTE	Partner	Engagement period
Funding scholarships for postgraduate Ethiopian students to study in Japan	Japanese Embassy in Addis Ababa	2021
Providing safe water supplies and toilets (WASH) to more than 3000 households in Ethiopia	Undisclosed	2021
Providing training to Customs Commission staff, including policy officers, on combatting the illicit tobacco trade	Customs Commission	2021
In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, producing and freely distributing hand sanitisers to disadvantaged communities in Lideta, a suburb of Addis Abba where the NTE Head Office is located	Local government of Lideta in Addis Ababa	2020
Supporting Ethiopian tobacco farmers with free seeds and agrochemicals	Smallholder farmers	2020
Publicly participating in tree planting initiatives as part of the Ethiopian government's Green Legacy national project	Motor & Engineering Company of Ethiopia Limited S.C. (MOENCO), Coca Cola and other five client companies of Mehrteab Leul & Associates Law Office (MLA)	2019
CSR, corporate social responsibility.		



### Box 1 Key loopholes in the contractual agreement in the 71% share sale by the Ethiopian government to Japan Tobacco International (JTI).

1. Conclude a MOU with the NTE, with the objective of reducing the illegal trade of tobacco products, which is significant in Ethiopia. In this regard, the Government's anti-illegal trade task force and the NTE should collaborate closely to define an action plan, and a list of measures to best ensure such an objective can be achieved.
2. During the law-making process, consulting and participating with relevant stakeholders and the public is a necessary precondition in Ethiopia. To this end, all branches of government and administrations, whose mission and efforts may be directly or indirectly impacted by any proposed modification or preparation of tobacco taxation, regulation or legislation should be consulted. The NTE should be consulted in a transparent manner during modification or preparation of tobacco taxation, regulations or legislation.
3. Take all measures necessary to ensure that the NTE retains its monopoly rights until December 2025, as per the contract of sale signed on 15 July 2016, and Proclamation No.181/1999 to issue business licenses in respect of the purchase, preparation, manufacture, sale, import, and export of tobacco and tobacco products.
4. Facilitate as much as possible the availability of foreign currency as may be reasonably required by the NTE, to implement its business plan.

MOU, memorandum of understanding; NTE, National Tobacco Enterprise.

by providing free seeds and pesticides, implicitly as part of NTE's CSR commitments. The article also suggests that policymakers should foster and facilitate tobacco production and marketing.

### Theme 2: Questionable TI interactions with the government to obtain benefits

Our study found that when JTI bought 71% of the government's NTE share in two instalments in 2016 (40%) and 2017 (30.9%), JTI received privileges in the sale contract agreement with the government, which enabled the company to interfere in tobacco control efforts. The significant benefits to NTE included participating in law-making processes, obtaining foreign currency for investments, partnering with a government body that controls illicit tobacco and retention of NTE monopoly rights until 2025 (box 1).

These examples demonstrate how the TI uses contractual privileges to influence public policy development and to hinder the impact of tobacco control laws. For example, using a contractual loophole, NTE signed an MOU with the Ethiopian Customs Commission to assist in activities to combat the illicit tobacco trade, particularly in eastern Ethiopia.<sup>35</sup> As in other countries, the TI in Ethiopia has cited inflated figures of the market share of the illicit tobacco trade.<sup>36</sup> NTE subsequently interfered in excise tax reform, using its MOU with the government to weaken tax provisions, claiming illicit trade accounted for 45% of the market. Consequently, government officials cited this figure during the lawmaking process, giving it credibility. A high-level minister from Ethiopia's Ministry of Finance is reported to have said, 'If the country imposes a higher tax, it will push the industry out of the market'.<sup>37</sup> The TI further used the MOU to advertise its products by labelling NTE tobacco products and its logo on

promotional materials as part of combating illicit tobacco products.<sup>38</sup> Moreover, the MOU allowed the TI to participate as a key stakeholder in government consultations about tobacco tax amendments and other tobacco control directives drafted by the EFDA that became part of Proclamation No. 1112/2019.

TI involvement in lawmaking processes exerts pressure on public health advocacy by delaying legal decision-making and advancing commercial interests by diluting public health provisions. For example, the TI delayed government decision-making by requesting additional time to comment on the proposed tobacco control directive (No. 771/2021)<sup>8</sup> and an English version of the draft directive.<sup>39</sup> Nonetheless, the EFDA pushed back against this request:

[The] NTE's claim that it is mandatory for the Ethiopian Food and Drug Authority to prepare the draft directive in the English language at this early stage of the Directive making process is incorrect. The Federal Administrative Procedure Proclamation No. 1183/2020 provided step-by-step requirements. Relevant to this matter, Proclamation No. 1183/2020 classified the requirements into two parts: (1) "procedures before adoption of a Directive (Articles 7-11), and (2) Ratification and Effectiveness of Directives (Articles 12-19). NTE's claim that the Ethiopian Food and Drug Authority must prepare the directive in English at this stage is an erroneous understanding of the law. (See online supplemental table 1)

However, during this period, Ethiopia's Ministry of Revenue awarded NTE a trophy for being a higher and loyal taxpayer for the 2019 fiscal year. The prime minister was present at the award ceremony. Such public recognition of the TI implies government support, endorsement and promotion, which appears to contravene Proclamation No.1112/2019.

### Theme 3: Countermeasures against TI interference through CSR activities

In response to the challenge of TI interference, the EFDA established the TI Monitoring and Response Team as a subcommittee of the National Tobacco Control Coordination Committee. This team uncovered and actively responded to TI CSR activities (table 2). Among NTE's CSR activities, the production and distribution of COVID-19 prevention hand sanitiser to the residents of Addis Ababa in the Lideta subcity was immediately halted by the EFDA with a countermeasure to stop further production and dissemination of these products. On 6 June 2020, MWECs exposed NTE's CSR efforts related to COVID-19 prevention as a tactic to regain its acceptability among both the public and the government.<sup>29</sup> Later in June 2020, MWECs further accused NTE of breaching the ban on advertisement and promotion of tobacco products by using the MOU on combatting Ethiopia's illicit tobacco trade to promote their products. MWECs exposed NTE's tactics that included using advertising on wall clocks and plastic bags distributed to shops, bars and restaurants featuring a 'Stop Contraband' slogan with NTE's name displayed underneath.<sup>38</sup> Unfortunately, there is no evidence of regulatory action against NTE in response to MWECs exposing this advertising.

### DISCUSSION

Our study findings demonstrate the TI's use of diverse CSR activities to improve its reputation, image and credibility as a corporate citizen in Ethiopia. These activities included funding travel scholarships for students, donating hand sanitiser and personal protective equipment to control COVID-19, and tree planting to reduce climate change. NTE also used CSR activities to promote tobacco products, such as by displaying its corporate

**Table 2** Summary of countermeasures against the tobacco industry's CSR activities in Ethiopia

CSR activity	Countermeasure	Action period	Responsible body	Outcomes
NTE produced hand sanitiser and distributed it in response to the COVID-19 pandemic	EFDA ceased production and distribution	2020	TIMRT EFDA MWECS	NTE stopped from producing and distributing COVID-19 prevention materials
	MWECS publicly exposed the CSR tactic	June 2020	MWECS	Exposed the TI's presence behind COVID-19 related CSR activities
Providing scholarships to Ethiopian students to study in Japan	CSOs sent a letter expressing concern over Japanese Embassy's involvement in JTI's CSR activity	2022	Consortium of Ethiopian NCD Associations TIMRT MWECS	No change identified
NTE engagement in Tobacco Advertising Promotion and Sponsorship by using the MOU signed with the Customs Commission	NTE used the MOU agreement with government to promote its products. This activity was exposed by MWECS	2020	MWECS	NTE continues engaging in Tobacco Advertising Promotion and Sponsorship
Recognition of NTE as a loyal taxpayer	The tobacco control community strongly criticised the action of the Ministry of Revenue for recognising NTE as a loyal taxpayer	2020	TIMRT MWECS EFDA	NTE removed from 2020 award list

CSO, civil society organisation; CSR, corporate social responsibility; EFDA, Ethiopian Food and Drug Authority; JTI, Japan Tobacco International; MOU, memorandum of understanding; MWECS, Mathiws Wondu Ye-Ethiopia Cancer Society; NCD, non-communicable disease; NTE, National Tobacco Enterprise; TI, tobacco industry; TIMRT, Tobacco Industry Monitoring and Response Team.

trademark and branding on tobacco products during a televised press conference promoting their CSR activities, and on anti-illicit tobacco promotional materials.

Our findings show TI strategic use of public CSR opportunities, such as the Green Legacy Project, to promote an image of itself as socially and environmentally responsible to deflect attention from the health and environmental impacts of tobacco products.<sup>40 41</sup> These include the negative environmental impacts from tobacco production and curing, product manufacturing and distribution, product consumption, and the waste generated from tobacco use.<sup>42 43</sup> Tobacco farming uses agrochemicals that reduce soil fertility and soil quality, uses a substantial quantity of water, and contaminates the air and water systems.<sup>44</sup> Tobacco farming in Africa poses a medium-to-serious degree of tobacco-related deforestation particularly in southern and eastern African countries, with the percentage of tobacco-related deforestation in Ethiopia accounting for close to 1% in 1995.<sup>42 43 45</sup> Almost 30 years since these estimates were made, it is anticipated this figure is substantially higher. According to the Global Center for Good Governance in Tobacco Control, harmful waste made up of cigarette butts and packs costs Ethiopia ETB911 million per year in water pollution and waste management.<sup>46</sup> These environmental impacts, in addition to the well-known health impacts of tobacco smoking,<sup>47</sup> are incompatible with Ethiopia's Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) commitments, especially to achieve the health targets in SDG 3, notably the specific target of reducing premature mortality from non-communicable diseases by a third by 2030.<sup>48</sup>

Our study highlights how NTE used the COVID-19 pandemic to develop an image of providing health-promoting assistance during a public health crisis through actively leading the distribution of hand sanitiser and personal protective equipment to disadvantaged communities. Similarly, in other global regions such as Europe, multinational tobacco companies used the COVID-19 pandemic to generate media attention to raise their corporate profile, advertise items like Heated Tobacco Products and to normalise tobacco use.<sup>49</sup> For instance, a tobacco company donated ventilators to the government of Greece.<sup>50</sup> Elsewhere in the world, the Canadian government partnered with Philip Morris International on COVID-19 vaccine development, providing an opportunity for the company to issue a press release that publicised the partnership.<sup>51</sup> Such activities that exploit a public health crisis involving a respiratory disease

are particularly inappropriate given tobacco is the leading cause of preventable death from respiratory diseases globally.<sup>52</sup>

Tobacco companies have increased spending on CSR activities in countries where governments have adopted comprehensive bans on tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship, or severely restricted these marketing opportunities.<sup>53</sup> Indeed, our results show that NTE has participated in multiple CSR activities since 2019 despite new laws expressly prohibiting this activity.<sup>7</sup> We also found no evidence that NTE was penalised for these activities. Additional capacity-building and funding may be required to ensure total advertising restrictions, such as those in Ethiopia, are effectively enforced.<sup>54</sup> In this regard, our study confirms that transnational tobacco companies can exploit CSR initiatives as one of their political operations to interfere with tobacco control efforts and to promote their products in low-income and middle-income countries.<sup>55</sup>

Proclamation No. 1112/2019<sup>7</sup> Article 51(3) and (4) forbids the Ethiopian government from accepting any assistance from the TI on any enforcement activities or entering into any partnership with the TI. However, in contravention of Article 5.3 of the WHO FCTC, our findings confirm NTE receives strong government support via crucial articles in the contract agreement that transferred the government's NTE shares to JTI in 2017 (box 1), predating the country's new tobacco control law passed in 2019. The relationship between JTI and the Ethiopian government through NTE ownership has wider implications for tobacco control in Africa, which was acknowledged by JTI's president and CEO: 'This significant increase in our ownership of NTE shares reaffirms Ethiopia as an increasingly important place to do business in Africa'.<sup>56</sup> Also, when announcing the purchase of a significant share in NTE, JTI claimed that 'Ethiopia will be an essential expansion of our geographic footprint in emerging markets', pointing to the country's 'double-digit economic development' and the company's anticipation that volumes would continue growing.<sup>57</sup>

The signed MOU between the Customs Commission and JTI/NTE to fight illicit trade gave NTE an opportunity to aggressively promote its products in the eastern part of the country, where illegal trade is assumed to be higher, using a display frame with a sign listing NTE products as part of putative efforts to fight illicit products.<sup>38</sup> However, an independent study estimated that the illicit market share of cigarettes was 19% in 2018, less than half the TI's estimate.<sup>58</sup>

Similarly, the Global Adult Tobacco Survey Ethiopia 2016 indicated that 87% of respondents who purchased cigarettes bought Nyala, which is manufactured by NTE.<sup>59</sup> Similarly, the TI has used exaggerated estimates of illicit trade to offset tax hikes in other countries such as South Africa, Vietnam and Georgia.<sup>60–62</sup> Furthermore, data on cigarette prices in Ethiopia show that, despite price rises in both legal and illicit products following the excise tax modification in 2020, the price of legal products remains lower than the price of illicit cigarettes.<sup>63</sup> This implies that factors other than tobacco tax drive the illicit tobacco trade in Ethiopia.

Despite a robust tobacco control legal framework in Ethiopia, our findings demonstrate challenges persist in implementation. Poor enforcement of laws and TI interference through a range of CSR initiatives undermine the impact of Ethiopia's new tobacco control policies. Furthermore, according to the Global Tobacco Industry Index, TI interference in Ethiopia increased from 2020 to 2021.<sup>12 13</sup> Our study revealed that the TI still uses CSR activities to gain influence, meddle in life-saving health policies and secure preferential treatment from government organisations.<sup>64</sup> The TI uses CSR to promote voluntary measures to control tobacco, create an illusion of being a 'changed' company and establish partnerships with health interests.<sup>65–67</sup> Likewise, the industry uses corporate donations and strategic stakeholder interactions beyond those that are necessary to regulate the industry to establish and maintain close relationships with non-health government bodies, such as through the MOU with the Customs Commission (table 1). Crosbie *et al*<sup>68</sup> reported over 100 'illicit tobacco trade'-related MOUs that were signed and publicised on TI websites, demonstrating this is a common tactic of the TI internationally.<sup>68</sup> This may be related to the fact that non-health government bodies have low awareness of TI interference strategies and the laws that prohibit interaction with the TI. Similarly, recent studies conducted in Ethiopia suggest low awareness among tobacco control stakeholders with greater awareness of Article 5.3 WHO FCTC among the health sector but not among non-health government sectors.<sup>15 16</sup> In addition, NTE uses other non-governmental bodies, such as the Japanese Embassy in Ethiopia and private organisations (ie, Mehrteab Leul & Associates Law Office) as avenues to interfere in tobacco control efforts and exert pressure on the government. Furthermore, our findings show that the TI interferes through working with other government-affiliated entities such as Motor & Engineering Company of Ethiopia Limited S.C. Similarly, in India, the TI has entered the food market and supports numerous government initiatives directly or indirectly through their CSR schemes.<sup>69</sup> Our findings are consistent with similar TI tactics observed in Zimbabwe. The Chinese TI that operates in that country leverages its ties with the Chinese embassy in Zimbabwe as well as engaging in CSR initiatives with other economic actors and development institutions to embed its interests and benefit from perceptions of state friendship.<sup>70</sup> Regular monitoring of these types of CSR activities is needed to raise the visibility of such practices and to advocate better control of TI use of CSR.

Ethiopia's tobacco control regulatory body, EFDA, and CSOs, such as MWECS, have attempted to counter some of the TI's CSR activities in Ethiopia. However, there are challenges in detecting and responding to interference in a timely manner. Nonetheless, some countries have successfully combated such activities by collaborating with CSOs. In Colombia and Bolivia,

for example, support from international health donors, as well as ongoing participation by local health groups, improved implementation capacity to oppose TI intervention and assure effective tobacco control implementation.<sup>71 72</sup> Moreover, engaging local tobacco control advocacy groups and key policymakers is a key factor for passage of tobacco control laws, as evidenced in the passage of smoke-free laws in Mexico and Ethiopia.<sup>73 74</sup> Hence, governments need more comprehensive vigilance concerning TI activities involving non-health portfolios to safeguard public health policies.

Contract agreements that allow the TI to participate in lawmaking, including commenting on draft legislation, regulation or excise tax, and participating in public hearings should be banned. Hence, Ethiopia needs to learn from the experience in other countries and rescind the MOU signed between JTI and the Customs Commission in compliance with WHO FCTC Article 5.3.<sup>75</sup> It is well established that the TI has exploited various voluntary agreements with the government to protect its profit while impeding the implementation of health policy in both high-income and low-income countries. Trade agreements are a notable example that give the TI an unwarranted opportunity to advocate its interests without public scrutiny.<sup>76</sup> All tobacco control and public health organisations, both within and beyond Ethiopia's health sector, should collaborate to advocate for protecting public health from the TI. The tobacco control community, particularly CSOs should be involved in promoting measures to protect public health from commercial actors. Moreover, our findings highlight the need for greater enforcement of Proclamation No. 1112/2019 to protect public health policymaking from industry involvement. Other actions that have been recommended include developing a code of conduct for all government sectors and creating a publicly accessible repository for information about the TI's activities in Ethiopia.<sup>15</sup>

### Study strengths and limitations

Despite our extensive search of publicly available data, our findings may not have identified all CSR activities since the passing of Ethiopia's strict tobacco control laws. This is due to the hidden or covert nature of TI interaction with government and other influential stakeholders. We traced publicly available data including government records to obtain information about CSR activities and other TI interference activities through targeted searches of likely data sources and information requests since there is no existing comprehensive repository to draw on. Despite these limitations, the findings provide insightful information about CSR activities in Ethiopia using available data from multiple sources. A strength of our study is the use of official letters in hard copies and documents exchanged between the government and the TI that were supplied by government departments on request.

### CONCLUSION

Our study demonstrates that TI interference in tobacco control efforts in Ethiopia through CSR activities continues despite laws that prohibit these activities. Our study also highlights the main TI alliances and entities that work to benefit the industry. These alliances included non-health government offices, the Japanese embassy in Addis Ababa and private law firms. Regular TI CSR monitoring and response plans are needed to develop tailored and integrated interventions to combat this interference in health policymaking. The government, in partnership with appropriate stakeholders such as CSOs, needs to monitor and address CSR breaches of SDG 3 and the WHO FCTC. Moreover, all existing



agreements with NTE should be revised to comply with the new law.

**Twitter** Sisay Derso Mengesha @DersoSisay and Coral E Gartner @CoralGartner

**Acknowledgements** The authors thank the Mathios Womdu Ye-Ethiopia Cancer Society for providing tobacco industry interference documents and letters.

**Contributors** SDM, the corresponding author, designed the intent of the research, collected data, analysed the document, and designed and drafted the manuscript. CEG and CB provided critical comments on and revised the draft manuscript. All authors have read the manuscript carefully and agreed to submit it for publication.

**Funding** The authors have not declared a specific grant for this research from any funding agency in the public, commercial or not-for-profit sectors.

**Competing interests** None declared.

**Patient consent for publication** Not applicable.

**Ethics approval** The study was approved by the Addis Ababa Health Bureau Ethical Clearance Committee (AAHB/6/28/100/2022).

**Provenance and peer review** Not commissioned; externally peer reviewed.

**Data availability statement** Data are available upon reasonable request. All data relevant to the study are included in the article or uploaded as supplementary information. Not applicable.

**Supplemental material** This content has been supplied by the author(s). It has not been vetted by BMJ Publishing Group Limited (BMJ) and may not have been peer-reviewed. Any opinions or recommendations discussed are solely those of the author(s) and are not endorsed by BMJ. BMJ disclaims all liability and responsibility arising from any reliance placed on the content. Where the content includes any translated material, BMJ does not warrant the accuracy and reliability of the translations (including but not limited to local regulations, clinical guidelines, terminology, drug names and drug dosages), and is not responsible for any error and/or omissions arising from translation and adaptation or otherwise.

**Open access** This is an open access article distributed in accordance with the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 Unported (CC BY 4.0) license, which permits others to copy, redistribute, remix, transform and build upon this work for any purpose, provided the original work is properly cited, a link to the licence is given, and indication of whether changes were made. See: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.

#### ORCID iDs

Sisay Derso Mengesha <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-5753-5677>  
Coral E Gartner <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-6651-8035>

#### REFERENCES

- Erku DA, Tesfaye ET. Tobacco control and prevention efforts in Ethiopia pre- and post-ratification of WHO FCTC: current challenges and future directions. *Tob Induc Dis* 2019;17:13.
- JTI. JT becomes majority shareholder of Ethiopia's NTE. Tokyo, Japan Japan Tobacco INC; 2017.
- Ethiopia F D R o. World Health Organization framework convention on tobacco control ratification proclamation no. 822/2014. Addis Ababa Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia house of people representative; 2014. 7247.
- Amboko J. Liberalising the economy isn't enough to deal with Ethiopia's foreign currency crunch; 2018. Available: <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/businessreview/2018/06/29/liberalising-the-economy-isnt-enough-to-deal-with-ethiopias-foreign-currency-crunch/> [Accessed 14 Jun 2023].
- WHO. WHO framework convention on tobacco control: guidelines for implementation article 5.3. WHO Geneva, Switzerland; 2013.
- Fooks GJ, Gilmore AB, Smith KE, et al. Corporate social responsibility and access to policy Élites: an analysis of tobacco industry documents. *PLoS Med* 2011;8:e1001076.
- FDREHPR. A proclamation to provide for food and medicine administration, proclamation 1112/2019, in proclamation 1112/2019, F.H.o.P. Representative, Editor. Addis Ababa: House of people representative, 2019: 74.
- EFDA. Tobacco control directive number 771/2021, L.a.m. legal, Editor. Addis Ababa: Ethiopian Food and Drug Authority, 2021.
- CTFK. Legislation by country Ethiopia: regulated forms of advertising, promotion and sponsorship; 2022. Available: <https://www.tobaccocontrolaws.org/legislation/ethiopia/advertising-promotion-sponsorship> [Accessed 12 May 2023].
- FDREHPR. The excise tax proclamation 1186/2020, in federal negarit gazette. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia House of People Representative; 2020. 34.
- Abate ZM, Desta TW. Mathiwo Womdu-Yeethiopia cancer society (MWCEs) experiences in involvement of Ethiopian tobacco control policy advocacy. *Tob Induc Dis* 2018;16.
- GGTC. Global tobacco industry interference index 2021: Ethiopia- country summary 2021. Geneva, Switzerland: Global Center for Good Governance in Tobacco Control, 2021.
- GGTC. Ethiopia 2020 tobacco industry index. Geneva, Switzerland Global Center for Good Governance in Tobacco Control; 2020.
- Barry RA, Abdullah SM, Chugh A, et al. Advancing whole-of-government approaches to tobacco control: article 5.3 and the challenge of policy coordination in Bangladesh, Ethiopia, India and Uganda. *Tob Control* 2022;31:s46–52.
- Hirpa S, Ralston R, Deressa W, et al. 'They have a right to participate as a Stakeholder': article 5.3 implementation and government interactions with the tobacco industry in Ethiopia". *Tob Control* 2022;31:s5–11.
- Ralston R, Hirpa S, Bassi S, et al. Norms, rules and policy tools: understanding article 5.3 as an instrument of tobacco control governance. *Tob Control* 2022;31:s53–60.
- Abdullah SM, Wagner-Rizvi T, Huque R, et al. 'A contradiction between our State and the tobacco company': conflicts of interest and institutional constraints as barriers to implementing article 5.3 in Bangladesh. *Tob Control* 2022;31:s33–8.
- Matthes BK, Lauber K, Zatoński M, et al. Developing more detailed Taxonomies of tobacco industry political activity in low-income and middle-income countries: qualitative evidence from eight countries. *BMJ Glob Health* 2021;6:e004096.
- Watts C, Burton S, Freeman B. 'The last line of marketing': covert tobacco marketing tactics as revealed by former tobacco industry employees. *Glob Public Health* 2021;16:1000–13.
- ATCA. Corporate social responsibility activities; 2022. Available: <https://atca-africa.org/corporate-social-responsibility-activities/> [Accessed 14 May 2023].
- Stubbs T, White V, Yong H-H, et al. Tobacco industry influence in low- and middle-income countries in the ASEAN region: qualitative interviews with tobacco control experts during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Tob Induc Dis* 2022;20:108.
- Braun V, Clarke V. Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qual Res Psychol* 2006;3:77–101.
- Tandon VK. Embassy of Japan and JTI reached an agreement to provide scholarships to Ethiopian students. 2021: 202. Available: <https://twitter.com/VijaiKumarTand4/status/1406137092330033154>
- ENA. JTI, Japan Embassy collaborate to provide scholarship for disadvantaged Ethiopian students. 2021. Available: [https://web.archive.org/web/20230604203913/https://www.ena.et/web/eng/w/en\\_24605](https://web.archive.org/web/20230604203913/https://www.ena.et/web/eng/w/en_24605) [Accessed 19 Feb 2023].
- Semonegna. Embassy of Japan and JTI reached an agreement to provide scholarships to Ethiopian students; 2021. Available: <https://web.archive.org/web/20230604204748/https://semonegna.com/embassy-of-japan-and-jti-agreed-to-provide-scholarships-to-ethiopian-students/> [Accessed 19 Feb 2023].
- Ethiopia E o J i. Signing ceremony of mou between the embassy of Japan and JTI (Japan tobacco international) on a framework of cooperation to provide scholarship to Ethiopian student; 2021. Available: [https://www.et.emb-japan.go.jp/itpr\\_ja/11\\_000001\\_00625.html](https://web.archive.org/web/20230604204937/https://www.et.emb-japan.go.jp/itpr_ja/11_000001_00625.html) [Accessed 26 Oct 2023].
- JTI. Last year in #Ethiopia, we initiated a program in which 3,000 households will be able to benefit from access to tap water points and new toilet facilities; 2021. Available: [https://web.archive.org/web/20230604205149/https://twitter.com/JTI\\_global/status/1382538421009326081](https://web.archive.org/web/20230604205149/https://twitter.com/JTI_global/status/1382538421009326081) [Accessed 26 Oct 2022].
- Gudina EK. COVID-19 in Ethiopia in the first 180 days: lessons learned and the way forward. *Ethiop J Health Dev* 2020;34.
- Getachew S. Upping the ante against the silent killer. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia The Reporter; 2020.
- Kassahun D. A story map of Covid19 cases in Addis Ababa; 2020. Available: <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/a7db254f6e1543a0b15164c84bfc0551> [Accessed 18 Feb 2023].
- Diplomats to partake in tree planting campaign Monday, in Ethiopian monitor. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia Ethiopian Monitor; 2019.
- Weyna A. Seedlings planting, Ethiopian television Ethiopia. P. 12:00 -1:00 PM; 2019.
- TIMR. List of participants from government office who are selected to attend a training organized by tobacco industry. Telegram 2021 March 19; 2021.
- Abebe D, Tadesse M. Tobacco production practice of smallholder in Bilate, Wolaita and Hawassa tobacco farms, Ethiopia; 2020.
- Astatike D. Illegal tobacco trade affects monopoly, in capital. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia Capital; 2019.
- Yelkal A. Controversy erupts over tobacco monopoly's market share, in the reporter (English version). Addis Ababa, Ethiopia The Reporter; 2022.
- G/Kristos M. Successive tax increase in store for tobacco products, in Ethiopian monitor. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia Ethiopian Monitor; 2020.
- Anberbir Y. Accusation hits NTE for breaching ban on tobacco advertising. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia The Reporter; 2020.
- Representative H o P. Proclamation No. 1183/2020: a proclamation to provide for federal administrative procedure, in 1183, F.N.G.o.T.F.D.R.o. Ethiopia, Editor. 2020, Federal Negarit Gazette of The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia: the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia House of People Representative.
- World Health Organization. Tobacco and its environmental impact: an overview; 2017.
- Lecours N. The harsh realities of tobacco farming: a review of socioeconomic, health and environmental impacts. tobacco control and tobacco farming: separating myth from reality; 2014. 99–137.

- 42 Novotny TE, Bialous SA, Burt L, *et al.* The environmental and health impacts of tobacco agriculture, cigarette manufacture and consumption. *Bull World Health Organ* 2015;93:877–80.
- 43 Wallbank LA, MacKenzie R, Beggs PJ. Environmental impacts of tobacco product waste: International and Australian policy responses. *Ambio* 2017;46:361–70.
- 44 Kutub MJR, Falgunee N. Environmental degradation due to tobacco cultivation in Bangladesh: a case study of Doulathpur, Kushtia. *Geografia* 2015;11.
- 45 Geist HJ. Global assessment of deforestation related to tobacco farming. *Tob Control* 1999;8:18–28.
- 46 GGTC. How should tobacco companies pay for their production in Ethiopia; 2022. Available: <https://tobaccoplastics.ggtc.world/storage/pdf-reports/Customized%20Fact%20Sheet%20-%20ET.pdf> [Accessed 18 Feb 2023].
- 47 Oncken C, McKee S, Krishnan-Sarin S, *et al.* Knowledge and perceived risk of smoking-related conditions: a survey of cigarette smokers. *Prev Med* 2005;40:779–84.
- 48 WHO. *Tobacco control for sustainable development*. World Health Organization, Regional Office for South-East Asia, 2017.
- 49 Girivalaki C, Mechili EA, Loghini CR, *et al.* Social responsibility during the COVID-19 pandemic: tobacco industry's Trojan horse in Europe. *Tob Prev Cessat* 2020;6:37.
- 50 Chapman M. Big tobacco criticised for 'Coronavirus publicity stunt' after donating ventilator; 2020. Available: <https://www.thebureauinvestigates.com/stories/2020-03-30/pmi-criticised-for-coronavirus-pr-stunt-ventilator-donation> [Accessed 01 May 2023].
- 51 Cohen J, C S P. Morris, the government of Canada collaborate on COVID-19 vaccine development. *Tob control*; 2020.
- 52 Gan H, Hou X, Zhu Z, *et al.* Smoking: a leading factor for the death of chronic respiratory diseases derived from global burden of disease study 2019. *BMC Pulm Med* 2022;22:149.
- 53 Assunta M, Ritthiphakdee B, Soerojo W, *et al.* Tobacco industry interference: a review of three South East Asian countries. *Indian J Public Health* 2017;61:535–9.
- 54 Hiilamo H, Glantz S. FCTC followed by accelerated implementation of tobacco advertising bans. *Tob Control* 2017;26:428–33.
- 55 Lee S, Ling PM, Glantz SA. The vector of the tobacco epidemic: tobacco industry practices in low and middle-income countries. *Cancer Causes Control* 2012;23:117–29.
- 56 Bekele K. Gov. withdraws from tobacco business. Addis Ababa The Reporter; 2017.
- 57 TobaccoReporter. JT group takes Ethiopian stake; 2016. Available: <https://tobaccoreporter.com/2016/07/18/jt-group-takes-ethiopian-stake/> [Accessed 28 Nov 2022].
- 58 Dauchy E, Ross H. Is illicit cigarette market a threat to tobacco control in Ethiopia *Nicotine Tob Res* 2022;24:1228–33.
- 59 EPHI. Ethiopian global adult tobacco survey: executive summary 2016. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia Ethiopian Public Health Institute; 2016.
- 60 Blecher E. A mountain or a Molehill: is the illicit trade in cigarettes undermining tobacco control policy in South Africa *Trends Organ Crim* 2010;13:299–315.
- 61 Nguyen A, Nguyen HT. Tobacco excise tax increase and illicit cigarette consumption: evidence from Vietnam. *Tob Control* 2020;29:s275–80.
- 62 Little M, Ross H, Bakhturidze G, *et al.* Analysis of the illicit tobacco market in Georgia in response to fiscal and non-fiscal tobacco control measures. *Tob Control* 2023;32:80–5.
- 63 Mengesha SD, Ross H. Response of legal and illegal cigarette prices to a tax increase in Ethiopia. *Tob Control* 2023;tc-2023-057931.
- 64 McDaniel PA, Cadman B, Malone RE. Shared vision, shared vulnerability: a content analysis of corporate social responsibility information on tobacco industry Websites. *Preventive Medicine* 2016;89:337–44.
- 65 World Health Organization. Technical resource for country implementation of WHO framework convention on tobacco control article 5.3 on the protection of public health policies with respect to tobacco control from commercial and other vested interests of the tobacco industry; 2012.
- 66 Jun J, Choi CW, Kim J. Bridging tobacco control advocacy and strategic communication scholarship: tackling the tobacco industry's Extrinsic corporate social responsibility with strategic networking. In: *The handbook of strategic communication*. 2021: 336–59.
- 67 Lo M -w. Tobacco control and procedural fairness in the context of investment treaty arbitration. *Contemp Asia Arb J* 2022;15:55.
- 68 Crosbie E, Bialous S, Glantz SA. Memoranda of understanding: a tobacco industry strategy to undermine illicit tobacco trade policies. *Tob Control* 2019;28:e110–8.
- 69 Chugh A, Bassi S, Nazar GP, *et al.* Tobacco industry interference index: implementation of the world health organization's framework convention on tobacco control article 5.3 in India. *Asia Pac J Public Health* 2020;32:172–8.
- 70 Fang J, De Souza L, Smith J, *et al.* "All weather friends": how China transformed Zimbabwe's tobacco sector. *Int J Environ Res Public Health* 2020;17:723.
- 71 Uang R, Crosbie E, Glantz SA. Tobacco control law implementation in a middle-income country: transnational tobacco control network overcoming tobacco industry opposition in Colombia. *Glob Public Health* 2018;13:1050–64.
- 72 Crosbie E, Perez S, Copa PC, *et al.* Tobacco control in Bolivia: transnational civil society efforts in securing a comprehensive law. *Nicotine Tob Res* 2022;24:1300–4.
- 73 Crosbie E, Sebríé EM, Glantz SA. Strong advocacy led to successful implementation of Smokefree Mexico city. *Tob Control* 2011;20:64–72.
- 74 CTFK. Tobacco control success story: Ethiopia. Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids; 2019.
- 75 Crosbie E, Sebríé EM, Glantz SA. Tobacco industry success in Costa Rica: the importance of FCTC article 5.3. *Salud Publica Mex* 2012;54:28–38.
- 76 Shaffer ER, Brenner JE, Houston TP. International trade agreements: a threat to tobacco control policy. *Tob Control* 2005;14 Suppl 2:ii19–25.



**Supplementary Table 1: Source of information for identified CSR activities**

S. N	Document/evidence source #	Source	date	description
1	Embassy of Japan and JTI reached an agreement to provide scholarships to Ethiopian students	Twitter <sup>1</sup>	2021/6/19	Detail of the scholarship has been presented with 13 trends on personal Twitter accounts.
2		Japan Embassy Website <sup>2</sup>	2021/5/21	On official website of Embassy of Japan, the ceremony of MOU signing between the embassy and JTI representative available.
3		Newspaper <sup>3</sup>	2021/5/21	Ethiopian Semonegna Newspaper reported the scholarship agreement
4		Ethiopian News Agency (ENA) <sup>4</sup>	2021/5/21	The Ethiopian news agency (ENA), had reported the Scholarship agreement
5	Provision of Water supply and Sanitation	Twitter <sup>5</sup>	April 15, 2021	JTI has announced the snapshot information about the provision of water and sanitation services for 3000 households via its official twitter account
6	NTE produced hand sanitiser and distributed for COVID-19 pandemic response.	Government internal communication	Between March and June 2020	Lideta Sub-city regulatory officer informed about this CSR activity to the tobacco industry response and monitoring team in March 2020 and EFDA reacted and stop the production and distribution of hand sanitiser by June 2020.
7		Newspaper <sup>6</sup>	June 6, 2020	NTE has produced hand sanitisers and distributed them to economically disadvantaged groups in the community for free.
8	NTE provide trainings for Government staff in Dire Dawa, Ethiopia	Telegram <sup>7</sup>		Email exchange between NTE and government office over the scheduled training and list of participated was captured by member of TIMR team and the information posted in TIMR team official Telegram channel
9		Website <sup>8</sup>	May 25- June 26	Regarding the number of COVID 19 case per sub-city of

				Addis Ababa reported by Daniel Kassahun
10	Participation in Green Legacy	Televised Press Conference <sup>9</sup>	July 26, 2019	Ethiopian Television had reported the press conference organised by Mehrteab Leul and Law firms that its employees and corporate clients including NTE to plant over 2, 500 seedlings at Adwa Park in Addis Ababa, on Monday, July 29, 2019
11		Newspaper <sup>10</sup>	July 26, 2019	Ethiopian Monitor, a newspaper, reported the participation of NTE in green legacy by planting 2000 seedlings as individual company and 2500 seedlings as part of MLA corporate clients along other sever companies.
12		Website <sup>11</sup>	July 29, 2019	MOENCO reported the participation of 8 companies including NTE in planting of seedlings on July 29, 2019 green legacy day.
13	NTE contributions to the 'Tobacco Production Practice of Smallholders' on tobacco farms	Published article <sup>12</sup>	2020	Researcher from NTE published an article on contribution of NTE to tobacco grower farmers proximate to NTE farms
14	Tobacco Illicit Trade and excise tax	News Paper <sup>13</sup>	2020	Higher government officials from Ethiopia's Ministry of Finance used NTE findings on illicit trade to decide not to raise tobacco taxes.
15	Contract agreement between NTE(JTI) and government of Ethiopia and NTE uses this advantage to promote its tobacco products	Government internal document	December 19, 2017	This agreement provides enormous advantage for tobacco industry to participate in law making process, signing an agreement to fight contrabands and so on.
16		Newspaper <sup>14</sup>	September 16, 2019	NTE signed MOU with Customs Commission to control Illicit tobacco trade
17		Newspaper <sup>15</sup>	June 27, 2020	NTE bleach proclamation 1112/2019 by participating in TAPS

18	Federal Administrative Procedure Proclamation No. 1183/2020 and EFDA response to NTE request on Tobacco control directive adaptation process	Government publicly available Proclamation <sup>16</sup>	2020	Give detail procedures how a directive or regulation drafted, approved and stakeholder participation.
19		Government internal document	October 2020	EFDA provided a response to NTE request to get English version of Tobacco Control Directive No. 722/2021
20	Counter measure to stop production and distribution of Sanitiser by NTE	Government internal document	June, 2020	The government internal document reported that TIMRT and EFDA had successfully halted the production and distribution of COVID-19 prevention material by NTE.
21		Nwespaper <sup>6</sup>	June 6, 2020	MWECS exposed the NTE participation in COVID-19 response CSR active by saying this "NTE is using the current COVID-19 crisis as an opportunity to regain its image and acceptability among the government and the general public."
22	MWECS exposed NTE about breaching of TAPS law	Newspaper <sup>15</sup>	June 27, 2020	Accusation hits NTE for breaching ban on tobacco advertising. NTE used MOU agreement with Customs Commission to promote its tobacco products.
23	Government Tobacco Cottrol bills	Publicly Available Percolation 112/2019	January 2019	EFDA percolation that totally ban tobacco industry interferences
24		Publicly available Proclamation 1186	February 23020	Excise tax percolation that se a mixed excise tax type and recommend a periodic increase of tax rate and adjust to inflation rate.
25	FCTC implementation Guideline	Publicly available Article 5.3 implementation Guideline <sup>17</sup>	2013	Guidelines for implementation of Article 5.3 of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control on the protection of public health policies with respect to tobacco control from commercialand



				other vested interests of the tobacco industry
26	Government withdraws from NTE and JTI become major shareholder	Newspaper	July 18, 2016	Tobaccoreporter reported that JTI claimed that “Ethiopia will be an important expansion of our geographic footprint in emerging markets. As the largest shareholder, we expect to be able to exert significant influence over the direction of the company. The country is currently experiencing double-digit economic growth, with industry volume also expected to continue to increase.”
27		Newspaper	December 23, 2017	The Reporter reported that government withdraws from tobacco business and the JTI representative said that “This significant increase in our ownership of NTE shares reaffirms our strong belief in the company and Ethiopia as an increasingly important place to do business in Africa,”
28	Civil Society Letter to response to scholarship agreement	Internal Document	December 25, 2021	The civil society and TIMRT wrote a letter to stop NTE agreement with Embassy of Japan in Addis Ababa to stop the CSR
29	Recognition of NTE as a loyal taxpayer	Government internal document	2020	EFDA and CSOs advocate to stop awarding of NTE as best taxpayer, as a result the ministry of revenue cancelled in the list since 2020.
30	Ethiopian Tobacco Interference Index	Ethiopian Index 2020	2020 <sup>18</sup>	Global Center for Good Governance on Tobacco Control reports about TI interference
31		Ethiopian Index 2021	2021 <sup>19</sup>	

### List of References

1. Tandon VK. Embassy of Japan and JTI reached an agreement to provide scholarships to Ethiopian students. In: @VijaiKumarTand4, editor. The Embassy of Japan in Ethiopia and Japan obacco International (JTI),signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) on 21st May 2021 2021.
2. Ethiopia EoJi. Signing Ceremony of MoU between the Embassy of Japan and JTI (Japan Tobacco International) on a framework of cooperation to provide scholarship to Ethiopian student Addis Ababa,

- Ethiopia: Embassy of Japan in Ethiopia; 2021 [Available from: [https://web.archive.org/web/20230604204937/https://www.et.emb-japan.go.jp/itpr\\_ja/11\\_000001\\_00625.html](https://web.archive.org/web/20230604204937/https://www.et.emb-japan.go.jp/itpr_ja/11_000001_00625.html)].
3. Semonegna. Embassy of Japan and JTI reached an agreement to provide scholarships to Ethiopian students: Ethiopian Semonegna; 2021 [Available from: <https://web.archive.org/web/20230604204748/https://semonegna.com/embassy-of-japan-and-jti-agreed-to-provide-scholarships-to-ethiopian-students/>].
  4. ENA. JTI, Japan Embassy Collaborate to Provide Scholarship for Disadvantaged Ethiopian Students Addis Ababa: Ethiopian News Agency (ENA); 2021 [updated 5/21/2021. Available from: [https://web.archive.org/web/20230604203913/https://www.ena.et/web/eng/w/en\\_24605](https://web.archive.org/web/20230604203913/https://www.ena.et/web/eng/w/en_24605)].
  5. JTI. Last year in #Ethiopia, we initiated a program in which 3,000 households will be able to benefit from access to tap water points and new toilet facilities. Last year in #Ethiopia, we initiated a program in which 3,000 households will be able to benefit from access to tap water points and new toilet facilities. 6:37 AM ed2021.
  6. Getachew S. Upping the ante against the silent killer. *The Reporter*. 2020 June 6, 2020.
  7. Team T. List of participants from government office who are selected to attend a training organized by tobacco industry. 1:23 pm ed: Telegram; 2021.
  8. Kassahun D. A story map of COVID19 cases in Addis Ababa 2020 [Available from: <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/a7db254fbc1543a0b15164c84bfc0551>].
  9. Weyna A. Seedlings Planting. Ethiopia: Ethiopian Television July 26, 2019. p. 12:00 -1: pm.
  10. Monitor E. Diplomats to Partake in Tree Planting Campaign Monday. *Ethiopian Monitor*. 2019 July 26, 2019.
  11. MOENCO. GO Green Ethiopia Addis Ababa, Ethiopia: Motor & Engineering Company of Ethiopia Limited S.C. (MOENCO), ; 2019 [Available from: <https://moencoethiopia.com/blog/go-green-ethiopia/>].
  12. Abebe D, Tadesse M. Tobacco Production Practice of Smallholder in Bilate, Wolaita and Hawassa tobacco farms, Ethiopia. 2020.
  13. G/Kristos M. Successive Tax Increase in Store for Tobacco Products. *Ethiopian Monitor*. 2020.
  14. Astatike D. Illegal tobacco trade affects monopoly. *Capital*. 2019 September 16, 2019.
  15. Anberbir Y. Accusation hits NTE for breaching ban on tobacco advertising. *The Reporter*. 2020 June 27, 2020.
  16. Proclamation No. 1183/2020: A Proclamation to Provide for Federal Administrative Procedure, 1183 (2020).
  17. WHO. WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control: guidelines for implementation Article 5.3. Geneva, Switzerland WHO; 2013.
  18. GGTC. Ethiopia 2020 Tobacco Industry Index. Geneva, Swizerland: Global Center for Good Governance in Tobacco Control; 2020. Contract No.: 2/16/2023.
  19. GGTC. Global Tobacco Industry Interference Index 2021: Ethiopia- country summary 2021. Geneva, Switzerland Global Center for Good Governance in Tobacco Control; 2021.