

Conclusion of new WHO report: Global alcohol companies use unethical marketing instruments in Africa

International alcohol companies misbehave in the African continent. The dominating and unethical character of alcohol marketing of these companies in African countries strengthens the urgent need to increase legislation on alcohol advertising in the African continent. That is one of the main conclusions of a new report published by the World Health Organization (WHO).

An independent monitoring exercise

The report is the first product of cooperation between, EUCAM the European Centre for Monitoring Alcohol Marketing, STAP the Dutch Institute for Alcohol Policy and the WHO, called MAMPA, Monitoring Alcohol Marketing in Africa. The report gives an overview of alcohol marketing practices and regulations in the Gambia, Ghana, Nigeria and Uganda.

In the spring of 2010, alcohol marketing activities in four Sub-Saharan African countries have been monitored. An important aim of the project was to develop a method to monitor alcohol marketing in low-income countries. Findings of this preliminary monitoring exercise have resulted in some recommendations on the effectiveness of existing and desired alcohol marketing regulations in order to protect young people against the harmful effects of exposure to alcohol advertising.



Waragi spirit billboard in front of a Primary School (Kampala, Uganda)

Global alcohol producers misbehave in Africa

Since the alcohol market is saturated in Europe and other western countries, global alcohol producers invest more and more money into marketing the product in developing countries. Marketing practices that are seen as unacceptable in Europe are used widely in Africa by well-known players such as Carlsberg, Anheuser-Busch and Heineken. The WHO report shows that company rules of alcohol producers based in Europe are not adhered to when marketing the product in the African countries monitored.

According to most self-regulation codes in Europe and most company rules, alcohol advertisements may not be placed within 500 feet of schools (eg Diageo Code of Conduct) or when more than 30 percent of the expected spectators is underage (eg AB InBev Code and European Self-regulation Code). Nevertheless, the WHO report shows illustrations of alcohol billboards in front of elementary schools, secondary schools and playgrounds.

According to EU law (AVMSD 2007) and most self-regulation codes (eg European self-regulation code art 3.1) alcohol marketing communications should not depict images, impressions, symbols, music, characters (either real or fictitious) that primarily appeal to persons below 18 years-old. Nevertheless, global alcohol companies use cartoons to market their product on African television.

Connections between alcohol and wealth are used commonly in alcohol advertisements, e.g. Nigeria's Star Big Life campaign markets the message that drinking Star beer is the beginning of the 'big life'. The latter is especially disturbing when realizing that drinking alcohol is one of the indicators that predict poverty.

The voluntary rule of Diageo restricts alcohol advertisements on Nigerian television before 9 pm. However, the report shows that the company does not adhere to its own rules.



Screen shots from an Opeimo spirit commercial on Ghanaian TV

Legislation important tool to limit unethical alcohol advertising

The independent monitoring exercise commissioned by the WHO Regional Office for Africa, shows that:

1. Ghana and Uganda rely fully on self-regulation. Their alcohol marketing is solely regulated and monitored by the alcohol companies. The aggressive alcohol marketing practices described in the report show a need for additional legislation that restricts the large volumes of alcohol marketing and the appealing content of the ads to young people.
2. Nigeria has a watershed on alcohol marketing on television and radio till 8 pm. The limited hours of television monitored in this pilot study, already showed no adherence to the extended watershed till 9 pm by the Nigerian Guinness' self regulatory code. Although the watershed is a good start, young people are still exposed to a lot of alcohol marketing on television and radio after 8 pm. Moreover, alcohol marketing outside television and radio is highly prevalent in Nigeria and not regulated by law. A more comprehensive alcohol marketing regulation is desired.
3. Alcohol marketing is strictly regulated in the Gambia. The preliminary monitoring of alcohol marketing in the Gambia shows that an effective alcohol marketing policy in the African continent seems feasible. Besides national characteristics of the country that support a strict alcohol marketing policy, the case of the Gambia shows that a clear alcohol marketing regulation limits the prevalence of alcohol marketing in society.

The full report can be found online at the website of [WHO African Region](#). For more information, please contact Avalon de Bruijn (adebruijn@eucam.info) or visit our website www.eucam.info.