

Tobacco Industry Front Group: The International Tobacco Growers' Association

Overview

Front groups, such as the International Tobacco Growers' Association (ITGA), are organizations funded and directed by tobacco companies to influence policy makers and the public in favor of the tobacco industry.¹ For example, the ITGA claims to represent and promote the cause of “millions of tobacco farmers” around the world.² The reality, however, is that ITGA *uses* tobacco farmers to represent the interests of a small number of transnational tobacco manufacturers.

The ITGA was initially formed in 1984 by farmers from Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Malawi, the United States and Zimbabwe², and was considered by the tobacco industry to be ineffective and poorly run.³⁻⁵ In the late 1980's, INFOTAB, a consortium of tobacco industry officials from major companies, decided to transform the ITGA into an organization used by transnational tobacco companies like Philip Morris (PM) and British American Tobacco (BAT) to “develop the agriculture lobby.”³

Despite attempts to downplay the presence of tobacco funding, the ITGA continues to be funded by transnational tobacco companies.⁶ Recent activities by the ITGA and its member organizations aimed at derailing strong tobacco control measures and negotiations of the World Health Organization (WHO) Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) include:

- Mobilizing farmers to protest when tobacco control measures are being considered.⁷⁻⁸
- Submitting comments on proposed tobacco control legislation and regulations.⁹⁻¹⁰
- Forming coalitions and promoting unsubstantiated research about the economic impact of tobacco regulation.¹¹

In setting and implementing health policy, Parties to the FCTC are legally obligated to protect their tobacco control policies from the commercial and other vested interests of the tobacco industry.¹² Because ITGA lobbies governments on behalf of the tobacco industry, Parties should not engage with the ITGA in setting and implementing their domestic tobacco control legislation or policy.

Current ITGA Activities

The tobacco industry uses the ITGA and its member organizations to undermine strong tobacco control policies and to attack the FCTC and its implementing guidelines.

- In June 2010, ITGA partnered with another industry supported farmers group in Indonesia, Aliansi Masyarakat Tembakau Indonesia (AMTI), to co-host a meeting in Jakarta of tobacco growers from Southeast Asia. The meeting resulted in a call for governments to reject the recent recommendations by the WHO to ban tobacco flavorings, urging them to “investigate other alternatives that can achieve public health goals while also protecting the millions of jobs that are dependent on tobacco growing.” The meeting also called for growers who attended the meeting to go back to lobby in their home countries.¹³
- In October 2010, ITGA helped to mobilize farmers in Mexico to protest against a proposed tobacco tax increase. Time and again farmers in Mexico have been given a stipend and bused into Mexico City by the tobacco industry to protest against proposed tobacco control measures that the industry claims would threaten farmer's livelihoods. In reality, the unfavorable conditions for tobacco farmers in Mexico has more to do with international tobacco company strategies and not with tobacco control policies designed to protect public health.⁸
- During the Conference of the Parties (COP 4) meeting in Uruguay in November 2010, ITGA mobilized farmers to oppose and protest the then draft guidelines to Articles 9, 10, 17 and 18 of the FCTC. ITGA claimed that proposed guidelines on tobacco regulation would lead to a ban on certain types of tobacco, negatively impacting the lives of millions of farmers.¹⁴ During COP 4, the President of ITGA, Antonio

Abrunhosa, admitted to the press that tobacco manufacturers supported ITGA's efforts in its campaign against the guidelines.⁶

- In March 2011, ITGA member organization in Brazil Associação dos Fumicultores do Brasil (AFUBRA) delivered 250,000 petitions from tobacco producers, workers and community members to the National Health Surveillance Agency (ANVISA). The petitions were sent in opposition to ANVISA proposed regulations to ban the use of additives in tobacco products.⁹⁻¹⁰

ITGA's Thirty Year History as a Front Group for the Tobacco Industry

The ITGA was transformed from a poorly run trade organization to a tobacco industry funded lobbying group in the late 1980s.³ Since then, the major international tobacco companies have been directing and financially supporting ITGA to push their political agenda and protect company profits.

1980s- early1990s: ITGA acted as a “front for [the tobacco industry's] third world lobbying activities”¹⁵ and was used “to attack WHO.”¹⁶

- An internal 1988 INFOTAB memo reveals that “ [tobacco] manufacturers, through INFOTAB, would ‘control’ the primary funding of the [ITGA] organization, and would thus be able to ensure that it stuck to politics...The ITGA would have the clout to combat idiotic crop-substitution programs...The ITGA could ‘front’ for our third world lobby activities at WHO, and gain support from nations hostile to MNCs[Multinational companies]...The ITGA (pushed by us) could activate regional agriculture lobbies which are at present very weak and resistant to industry pressure.”³
- Internal tobacco corporate documents disclose that ITGA was central to the tobacco industry's coordinated and extensive efforts throughout the 1980s-1990s to “attack WHO” and to “contain, neutralize [and] reorient” WHO's tobacco control activities. ITGA tactics included lobbying UN representatives in Geneva and Rome about the economic importance of tobacco, asserting that other pressing public health issues should take precedence over tobacco control, and representing WHO's tobacco control program as the agenda of high-income countries carried out at the expense of low-income countries.¹⁷
- In 1992, Agro-Tobacco Services (ATS) was established by BAT, Philip Morris, R.J. Reynolds, Rothmans, Gallaher and Reemtsma to continue INFOTAB's coordination of the ITGA's lobbying activities.¹⁸⁻²¹ ATS was created to “control the international voice of agro-tobacco” on behalf of tobacco manufacturers by providing ITGA with various materials and producing ITGA's newsletters, among other activities.²⁰ During this time, INFOTAB continued to provide the majority of ITGA's funding through another industry group, the Tobacco Documentation Center (TDC).²²⁻²³
- In 1995, tobacco manufacturers eliminated their direct funding of ITGA.⁴ Instead the industry started to dictate ITGA's actions through a UK public relations firm, Hallmark Marketing Services.²⁴ Rather than directly funding ITGA, tobacco manufacturers paid Hallmark for ITGA contributions “for very obvious and important reasons to keep the [manufacturers'] connection with ITGA discreet.”²⁵

Late 1990s-early 2000s: ITGA was used as the international tobacco manufacturers' public relations tool to address child labor issues in Africa and to undermine the development of the FCTC.

- In 1998, the International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers' Associations (IUF), set out to document the extent of child labor in tobacco farming. During their campaign the IUF sought “mutual cooperation” from the tobacco industry to eradicate child labor practices in Malawi. After initially denying the existence of child labor in Malawi, the tobacco industry, lead by BAT, decided to instead use the ITGA to “manage” the child labor issue.²⁶ With regard to ITGA's role, BAT manager Shabanji Opukah stated:

“[I] am trying to ensure that we maximize the use of the ITGA in the management of various issues and leverage their global outreach and influence in the tobacco farming sector. This is how we get value for our cash and time contribution. I would in particular very much like them to delve more into the child labour and WHO issues and I am happy that thus far we are leading the debate here and they are co-operating. Otherwise what is the point of having the membership and paying the money.”²⁷

- In 1999, ITGA signed a joint statement with IUF, witnessed by the International Labor Organization (ILO), agreeing in principle to end child labor in tobacco farming, but in reality the statement eliminated any direct obligation of the tobacco industry to effectively address the issue. The agreement between ITGA and IUF launched a major tobacco industry corporate social responsibility program in Africa, the Eliminating Child Labour in Tobacco Growing Foundation (ECLT). Since its creation, the ECLT has been used as a tactic to improve the image of tobacco companies, but has done little to address the issue of child labor.²⁶
- During the early 2000s, Hallmark worked to help ITGA become a “credible (i.e. non-manufacturer) front end for the battle over TFI [WHO’s Tobacco Free Initiative] and the Tobacco Control Convention” in order to “help co-ordinate the response of the industry without individual major manufacturer falling over each other.”²⁸ Throughout the early negotiations of the FCTC, Hallmark carried out ITGA’s public affairs program which included “road shows” throughout Africa, Latin America and India with the aim of lobbying governments to take a “more balanced position” on the FCTC.²⁹ Hallmark’s budget to coordinate these activities in 2000-2001 totaled £ 471,900.³⁰
- In 2001, BAT summed up their use of ITGA as a front group in a report: “We co-fund along with other tobacco companies a PR programme for the ITGA each year. We are an active participant in the programme and industry driver. ITGA has undertaken a range of activities to raise awareness of the WHO FCTC.”³¹

Conclusion

The tobacco industry has a history of using front groups like the ITGA to undermine the creation and prevent the passage of strong tobacco control laws. For the past thirty years, the ITGA has represented the interests of international tobacco companies, not the livelihoods and well-being of tobacco farmers. Currently the ITGA is increasing lobbying efforts to block passage and implementation of strong tobacco control policies in country as well as the development of FCTC Guidelines. According to FCTC Article 5.3 Parties are obligated to protect their tobacco control policies against the tobacco industry’s interests. ITGA lobbies governments on behalf of the tobacco industry and therefore Parties should not engage with the ITGA when setting tobacco control policies designed to protect public health.

Appendix A: ITGA Structure and Member Organizations

In its current form, the ITGA includes organizations from 23 member countries (listed below) and keeps its headquarters in Castelo Branco, Portugal. ITGA is run by a Board of Directors comprised of a Chief Executive, President and a Vice President. In 2011, António Abrunhosa is listed as the CEO, a post he's held since 1999 and Jorge Nestor as the President.²

ITGA Member Country, 2011	In Country Organization(s)
Argentina	Cooperativa Tabacalera de Misiones Asociación de Plantadores de Misiones Cooperativa de Tabacaleros de Jujuy, Ltda Cooperativa de Productores Tabacaleros de Salta Camara del Tabaco de Salta Camara del Tabaco de Jujuy Camara del Tabaco de Misiones
Brazil	Associação dos Fumicultores do Brasil (AFUBRA)
Bulgaria	Tobacco Producers' Union
China	China Tobacco Society
Colombia	Fedetabaco
Croatia	Croatia Tobacco Growers' Association
Dominican Republic	Instituto del Tabaco
India	The Tobacco Institute of India
Indonesia	AMTI (Aliansi Masyarakat Tembakau Indonesia)
Italy	Cooperativa Tabacchi Verona
Kenya	Nyanza Eastern Western Tobacco Farmers' Association
Malawi	Tobacco Association of Malawi
Malaysia	National Tobacco Board
Mexico	ARIC
Pakistan	Pakistan Tobacco Board
Philippines	Tobacco Growers' Association of the Philippines
Portugal	Associação Produtores Tabaco
South Africa	The Tobacco Institute of South Africa
Tanzania	Tanzania Tobacco Coop. Apex. Ltd.
Uganda	Uganda Tobacco Growers
United States	Flu Cured Tobacco Cooperative Stabilization Corporation Burley Tobacco Stabilization Corporation Burley Tobacco Cooperative Association, Inc.
Zambia	Tobacco Association of Zambia
Zimbabwe	ZTA

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