

***NATIONAL STAKEHOLDERS' CONFERENCE ON GHANA NATIONAL
ALCOHOL POLICY (NAP) JOINTLY ORGANISED BY
BARAKA POLICY INSTITUTE (BPI)
AND
MINISTRY OF HEALTH (MOH)***

REPORT

Introduction

There is a growing concern on the high incidence of alcohol consumption among the citizenry, particularly, the youth in the country in recent times. The situation is even more disturbing with the alarming rate of blithered advertisement on alcohol products on the media that aim at luring people into alcohol consumption with very little or no recourse to its harmful or negative effects on the people.

In response, the Ministry of Health with technical support from the World Health Organization (WHO) initiated the drafting of a National Alcohol Policy for Ghana on 16th June, 2011. Since then, series of technical sessions have been held which have led to the development of the 8th Draft of the National Alcohol Policy (2014). Following the establishment of Baraka Policy Institute (BPI), the Think Tank began to explore innovative and effective ways of contributing to the reduction and regulation of alcohol manufacturing, importation and consumption in the country. This forms part of BPI's advocacy work against substance abuse. In line with this, BPI initiated a working relationship with the Ministry of Health and the technical committee responsible for the draft of NAP with the view to give intellectual and financial support to the committee in order to enhance the speedy drafting of the NAP, the development of LI and its adoption by the Parliament of Ghana.

Subsequently, BPI managed to have a strategic meeting with the Minister of Health, Mr. Alex Segbefia at his residence on October 25, 2015 on the need to hold a national stakeholders' conference to finalize the 8th draft and strategize for the development and adoption of a Legislative Instrument (LI) for the control of harm due to alcohol use as stated in the Public

Health Act (Act 851). The Minister together with BPI Officials then fixed December 3, 2015 for a National Stakeholders' Conference on National Alcohol Policy (NAP) as proposed by BPI.

Conference Conveners:

Following the meeting with the Minister, Baraka Policy Institute (BPI) decided to contact the Ag. Chief Director of the Ministry of Health (MOH), Dr Nafisah Zakariah with the proposal of BPI jointly organizing the conference with the Ministry. The Ministry readily accepted the BPI proposal and a joint committee made up of officials of BPI and the Ministry of Health was set up to plan and organize the conference.

Conference Objectives

1. To finalize Stakeholder discussion on the eight draft of the National Alcohol Policy.
2. To discuss and adopt a common strategy for speedy adoption of the National Alcohol Policy for Ghana.

Expected Conference Outcome

1. A final stakeholder approved National Alcohol Policy (NAP).
2. A strategy document towards a speedy adoption of the propose National Alcohol Policy.
3. Inauguration of strategy implementation Committee to ensure the adoption of the policy.

The Conference:

i. Attendance

The Conference was attended by forty-Two (42) participants from 21 Stakeholder institutions and organizations Notable public personalities who attended the conference include the Minister of Health (Hon. Alex Segbefia), the Chairman of the Parliamentary Select Committee on Health(Hon.Wisdom Gidisu), a Ranking Member of the Parliamentary Select Committee on Health (Hon. Richard Anane), the President of BPI,(Mr. Salem Kalmoni) among other high profile personalities from the pertinent government and non-governmental agencies, the alcohol industry, Faith Based Organizations (FBOs), Civil Society Groups among others (please see the attached attendance list).

ii. First Session: Official Opening (9:55 am – 10:50am)

The first session was the official opening session of the conference. It witnessed the showing of a brief documentary on the negative effects of alcohol on a person, the welcome address by the Chief Director of the Ministry of Health and the delivery of the Keynote Address by the Hon. Minister of Health, Mr. Alex Segbefia.

The documentary on the devastating effects of alcohol consumption on the individual was a real life story in which a Ministry of Health team had chosen 3 alcoholics to show case the negative effects of alcohol. The production of this documentary was sponsored by the Ministry of Health as part of its campaign against alcohol consumption in Ghana.

The Director/Legal of the Ministry of Health, Mr. Hamidu Adakrugu delivered the Welcome Address on behalf of the Chief Director who had urgently travelled out of the country just a day before the conference. In her address, the Chief Director underscored the purpose of the conference and stated “We are here today to share and build consensus on the National Alcohol Policy for Ghana. This national conference will also enable us to chart a way forward in adopting a common strategy for the speedy adoption of the National Alcohol Policy and a Legislative Instrument, LI for Ghana”. She added that the National Alcohol Policy details how the issue of harmful use of alcohol will be handled in Ghana; and that particular emphasis is placed on protecting vulnerable groups, preventing underage drinking as well as opportunities for the control of alcohol related harms. Admitting the challenges faced since the start of the drafting stage of the NAP, the Chief Director said the road leading to the current 8th draft of the policy has not been an easy one and commended all stakeholders for their commitment in developing this document to protect the health of Ghanaians. Concluding her address, the Chief Director stated “We are at the finishing stages of the document and may I urge all of us to endure this session today knowing that we would be contributing to a document that will protect us and our children from harmful alcohol use”.

In his opening address, the Minister of Health, Hon. Alex Segbefia commended BPI for the collaboration with the Ministry on a project as important as the NAP project. He observed that, the consumption of alcohol has been a cause for great concern both internationally and locally. The Minister said that the current trend of irresponsible alcohol consumption with its attendant

health and social problems is a source of worry to the Ministry; and that it has noted with concern the weak regulation regarding alcohol production, importation, sales and adverts. Furthermore, the Minister reminded the technical committee of the NAP to bear in mind the informal sector which produces local alcoholic beverages with high percentage of ethyl alcohol which is also largely unregulated and therefore must be factored into the final drafting of the NAP.

The Minister then pledged the Ministry's commitment in ensuring that the NAP is adopted at the Parliament of Ghana for the common good of the citizenry. He concluded by saying "It is our hope that the interventions and programmes put forward in the final document will be based on evidence that is locally and internationally sourced and that the implementation mechanisms proposed will be sustainable and involve all stakeholders. It is also our hope that effective services would be available, accessible and affordable for those affected by the harmful use of alcohol".

iii. The Second Session: Conference Deliberations

The second session of the conference was in two segments: Opening Remarks by some key stakeholders, and Discussion on the 8th Draft of the NAP. The key stakeholders who were asked to give remarks are BPI, Association of Alcohol Manufacturers and Importers (AAMI) and the Christian Council of Ghana.

Remarks by Key Stakeholders:

1. BPI Opening Remarks

BPI was the first be asked to present its opening remarks. The President of BPI, Mr. Salem Kalmoni presented the BPI Opening Remarks at the conference. Below is the speech of BPI President at the conference:

"Mr. Chairman, Honourable Minister of Health, Hon. Members of Parliament, Directors of Ministry of Health. The NAP Technical Committee, Civil Society Groups present, Distinguished Invited Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen.

It is with much pleasure that I give a short remark on behalf of Baraka Policy Institute (BPI) on the idea of having a National Alcohol Policy for our dear nation, Ghana, Indeed, we at BPI are happy to be associated with the organization of this conference.

BPI is a policy and advocacy Think Tank on Social Justice and Development with particular focus on education and general wellbeing of the people. With regards to physical wellbeing of the people, our current focus is on substance abuse. It is a reality that substance abuse has robbed the nation and continues to rob us of many talented and ingenious youth who are supposed to be the future of our dear nation, Ghana.

Mr Chairman, Hon. Minister, Fellow Stakeholders, Ladies and Gentlemen, indiscriminate alcohol consumption has been acknowledged universally as having very significant negative effects on the individual and the society at large. The medical, psychological and social effects of alcohol abuse have been widely documented. I have recently read an important book published just this year (2015) by two Nobel Prize-winning economists, George A. Akerlof and Robert J. Shiller. They argue in their book “Phishing for Phools: The Economics of Manipulation and Deception” that in a free economy, peoples’ weaknesses are exploited for profit; and that it is a common knowledge that people are not completely rational in their behavior. They argue that people often make choices which are detrimental to their health and financial wellbeing. The two distinguished researchers conclude that availability of alcohol without any regulation or restriction is the main catalyst for alcohol abuse and its attendant negative effects in society. They therefore make a strong case for state regulation and effective monitoring by civil society in order to prevent the excesses of free-market economy.

Consequently, many countries the world over have realized the need to embark on interventionist measures to protect the citizenry especially the vulnerable ones such as children and the youth. In this regard, countries such as Kenya, South Africa, Canada, European Union countries and most states of the United States of America among others have resorted to strict legislation to regulate alcohol consumption and its abuse among their citizenry.

Mr. Chairman, Hon. Minister, it is in this vein that BPI welcomes and appreciate effort being made for the adoption of a National Alcohol Policy. However, with the escalating alcohol consumption in Ghana and the aggressive unregulated alcohol advertisements aiming at luring unsuspecting youngsters into alcohol drinking that we witness daily in our electronic media, it is almost absurd that the policy has remained in the drafting stage since June 2011 without the needed attention. It is time that all stakeholders including government agencies, alcohol companies and civil society organizations such as BPI work together expeditiously to get the policy in place in order to protect our people especially the vulnerable from the scourge of alcohol abuse.

BPI is optimistic that this special conference will finalize Stakeholder discussion on the Eighth draft of National Alcohol Policy and adopt a common strategy for its speedy adoption.. We also expect dispassionate and progressive discussion on the current draft.

In concluding, on behalf of BPI and on my own behalf, I wish to profusely salute all who have worked tirelessly since 2011 to bring the draft to this far. The World Health Organization (WHO), the Ministry of Health, and the National Alcohol Policy committee deserve a special commendation in this regard. It is expected that this conference will consolidate the effort so far and draw effective roadmap for the speedy adoption of a National Alcohol Policy in Ghana.

Thank you and God bless you.”

2. Remarks by AAMI

An Executive Committee member of the Association of Alcohol Manufacturers and Importers (AAMI) Rita Rockson spoke for the alcohol industry. She said the industry has shown commitment to the drafting of the National Alcohol Policy since 2011. The industry has therefore been part of the drafting of the Alcohol Policy from its inception. She concluded that the industry is particular interested in the effort to ensure that the alcoholic products are not abused.

3. Remarks by Christian Council

Rev. Abraham Opoku-Baffour represented the Christian Council of Ghana at the conference. In his opening remarks, Rev, Opoku-Baffour called for the ban on all alcoholic products in Ghana. According to him, alcohol is really causing harm in the society and destroying the youth in the country. He supported all the view raised by the President of BPI and asked that the focus of deliberation at the conference should be how alcohol consumption can reduced and subsequently eliminated in Ghana. He commended the organizers of the conference for the initiative and asked the conference to be courageous to draft policies that will reduce alcohol consumption in Ghana.

Discussions on the 8th draft Alcohol Policy

Mr. Kofi Edusei, the focal person on the National Alcohol Policy at the MOH gave a presentation on the thematic areas of the policy which needed to be discussed at the conference for final adoption by stakeholders. According to Mr.Edusei, the development of Legislative Instrument (LI) for onward submission to Parliament will start just after the conference. Therefore, there was the need to reach a consensus on the current draft by all stakeholders present.

After the presentation by Mr. Edusei, conference agreed that the entire 8th draft should be read line by line. Apart from the some wordings in the preamble of the NAP which were contested by

the representatives of the alcohol industry, the substantive control and regulative policies in the 8th draft of the NAP were agreed upon unanimously by conference. However, a Ranking Member of Parliamentary Select Committee on Health, Hon. Richard Anane advised that certain policy constructions should be redraft in order to avoid ambiguities.

Third Session: Closing Plenary

The third session was the closing session where closing remarks of key stakeholders were taken, and a strategic committee to champion the process of the development of the LI and the subsequent submission to parliament was formed.

In all remarks, key stakeholders were happy with the way conference was organised and the outcomes of the conference. At the closing plenary session, conference set up an 11-member committee to participants were happy with the way the conference was and issues discussed.

Outcome of the Conference

The following are the key outcomes of the conference

- General agreement by all Stakeholders on the current draft of the NAP
- General agreement by all stakeholders on the need to start the development of the LI
- Setting up of Strategic Committee by Conference to push the NAP agenda

The terms of reference for the committee include:

- To ensure that all corrections and inputs made at the conference were effected on the final draft.
- To facilitate the development of the Legislative Instrument, LI for the National Alcohol Policy by the Attorney General Department.
- To co-ordinate all activities towards the final adoption of the NAP by Parliament

The following constitute the committee set up by conference:

- Attorney General Department (1 rep)
- Ministry of Health (2 reps)
- Baraka Policy Institute -BPI(1 rep)
- Mental Health Authority (1 rep)
- Alcohol Industry, 2 reps (AAMI-1; and Local Manufactures- 1)

- Faith based organizations (2 reps: Muslim and Christian)
- Ghana Medical Association (1 rep)
- Coalition of NGOs in Health (1 rep)

Conclusion

By and large, it can be said that the conference achieved its core objectives and expected outcomes. BPI has been recognized by all stakeholders as the key civil society organization behind the advocacy for NAP. Therefore, it is expected that BPI continues to champion the NAP agenda until it is adopted by parliament of Ghana.