

## Anti-tobacco Media Alliance (ATMA), Bangladesh

The Anti-Tobacco Media Alliance – ATMA, is a Bangladeshi journalists’ network of over 450 trained journalists on tobacco control issues working across the country since 2011. PROGGA works as the central Secretariat of ATMA.

ATMA started its journey in 2011, following a series of workshops for national and sub-national level journalists on key tobacco control issues. Since its inception, ATMA has emerged as a formidable pressure group shaping the country’s tobacco control policies.

### Goals of ATMA

The goal of ATMA is to ensure the facilitating roles of media towards the national goal of building a tobacco-free Bangladesh by 2040. To attain this goal, ATMA generates reports and media pieces which influence policymakers to formulate necessary policies and its implementation.

### The Emergence of ATMA

A series of trainings on tobacco control issues for national and sub-national level journalists were conducted by PROGGA and Press Institute of Bangladesh (PIB) from January 2010 to January 2011 under the earned media initiatives of PROGGA, commissioned by Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids (CTFK). The trained journalists strongly viewed to form a network to get involved with tobacco control movement under a common platform to share updated facts and figures with each other to foster the TC movement in a very sustainable manner.

After a series of small/ working group meetings and some other ground works, on 5<sup>th</sup> February 2011 the Anti-Tobacco Media Alliance formally launched in Dhaka with the presence of CTFK Executive Vice President Yolonda Richardson and CTFK Director South Asia Programs, Vandana Shah.

### What ATMA Does

- Quality media coverage on tobacco control issues.
- Pre budget meeting with National Board of Revenue (NBR) as stakeholder.
- Organize joint events on key issues.
- Attend tobacco control events organized by different TC organizations.
- Advocacy with relevant stakeholders.
- Organize media gatekeeper workshops.

### How ATMA works

Central and regional chapters of ATMA hold meeting on a regular basis to discuss tobacco control priority issues and other organizational aspects. As the Central Secretariat, PROGGA shares key developments on tobacco control, insights and resources.

- The central secretariat of ATMA is located in Dhaka while six sub-national secretariats are in six divisions\*. PROGGA serves as the secretariat at central level as well as for Rajshahi, Rangpur, Sylhet, Khulna, Chittagong and Barisal chapters.
- A regular periodic meeting is held in every 4 months at central and sub-national level to discuss the tobacco control priority issues along with organizational aspects of ATMA. Two ATMA members from each region attend the central periodic meeting and subsequently share the meeting results in the regional periodic meeting to synchronize the discussions. Besides, ATMA accomplishes TC activities jointly with other TC organizations, government bodies, and other agencies.
- The central secretariat shares the TC updates, resources (Policy Documents, Media Briefs, E-Newsletter, Factsheets, Case Stories, and News Coverage etc.), information through a common e-mail group and Facebook among ATMA members working across the country. Regular follow ups are done often with members as well.
- **Gatekeepers' Engagement:** PROGGA frequently organizes workshops for media gatekeepers and senior journalists (i.e., Chief News Editor, News Editor, Chief Reporter, Executive Editor) to create a more supportive environment for ATMA journalists working in different media outlets. In these workshops, senior and influential media personnel are sensitized, oriented and updated on major tobacco control related issues, and in turn, become tobacco control advocates themselves. The sensitized media gatekeepers assign more reporters on different tobacco control issues and place media pieces in front-page, back-page, business-page lead news and editorials, thus contributing in both enhancing the numbers and quality of media stories.

\* Due to COVID-19 pandemic, ATMA periodic meeting held at central level only.

## Achievements of ATMA

Since its inception, ATMA has transformed the very nature of tobacco control reporting in Bangladesh. Before ATMA, media coverage on tobacco control issues was limited to health tips on tobacco cessation and event-based reports. ATMA broadened the media outlook, introduced investigative and in-depth reporting on tobacco control policies formulation, tobacco industry interference, tobacco taxation and many more.

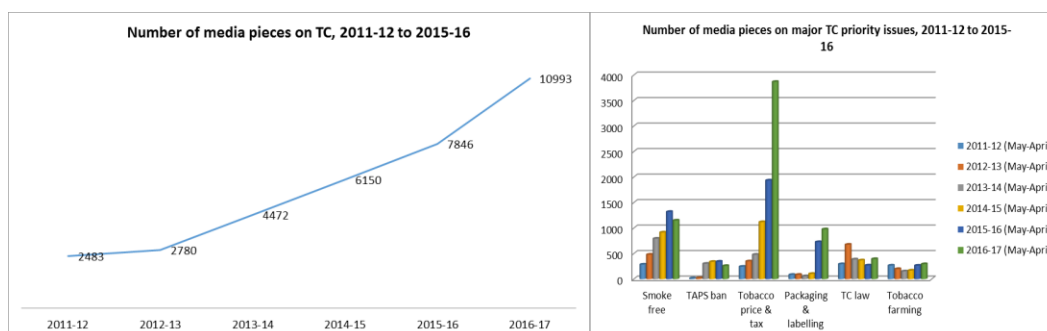
ATMA's achievements are not limited to the enhanced and quality media coverage. Over the years, as a pressure group, ATMA facilitated the formulation and implementation of major policies in tobacco control, such as the Amendment of TC law (2013), Finalization of TC rules (2015), Implementation of GHW (March 2016), Health Development Surcharge Management Policy (2017), raising tobacco taxes, achieving 1% HDS, Formulation of HDS policy, Initiation of National TC policy and Tobacco Farming Control Policy, exposing ill tactics of tobacco industry to undermine TC policies and finally popularization and implementation of the TC law.

Between 2009 and 2017, there has been 18 percent relative reduction in the prevalence of tobacco use in Bangladesh, as reported in Global Adult Tobacco Survey (GATS) 2017 findings. With its vigilance on industry interference, push for anti-tobacco policy measures, and awareness raising reporting on tobacco's devastating impacts in national life, ATMA contributed significantly to this achievement.

The key achievements of ATMA are as follows;

#### 4.a. Media Attention

PROGGA media monitoring data shows that since the inception of ATMA (2011), media attention on tobacco control priorities (TC law/law amendment, smoke free, packaging labeling, tobacco taxation, tobacco industry (TI) accountability, tobacco advertisement, promotion, and sponsorship (TAPS) ban, farming etc.) has been increasing gradually over the years which have substantially contributed in attaining relevant policies and implementation (see graphs).



- Graphs reflected increased media attention on TC in BD since 2011, ATMA/earned media initiatives are one of the main contributing factors to this favorable media environment for TC (Note: substantial media coverage produced in local media, which could not be monitored due to resource constraint). TC law related media pieces increasingly increased until the amendment of TC law in 2013. Media coverage on smoke-free issues, TAPS ban, tobacco tax and tobacco farming are in increasing trend.

#### 4.b. Generating Momentum for Policy Formulation

- Increasing media pressure contributed to pass **Amended TC law in 2013**, which was delayed 22 months by TI strong interferences.
- Strong media support helped pass **TC Rules in 2015** for the effective implementation of TC law.
- The huge media stories including numbers of editorials over Graphical Health Warning (GHW) contributed to implement the GHW in the first set deadline **19<sup>th</sup> March 2016**, which is a very rare example in the world.
- The continuous media pressure contributed to raise tobacco taxes (though it is not so effective and up to the mark) and **achieve 1% health development surcharge** (FY 2014-15).
- ATMA facilitated major tax reforms in tobacco. In 2017-18, the “Retail Price” replaced the outdated “Tariff Value” system in Bidi as the tax base for the supplementary duty (SD). In 2018-19, in smokeless tobacco, the “Retail Price” replaced the “Ex-factory Price” as the tax base for the supplementary duty (SD).
- The media stories on aggressive expansion of tobacco farming created pressure to initiate formulating **Tobacco Farming Control Policy**, which is now underway.

- The media stories over importance of formulating policy to use 1% HD surcharge contributed to approve the **Health Development Surcharge Management Policy 2017**.
- Huge number of media stories have been coming to expose ill tactics of tobacco industry to undermine TC movement, and to draw attention of policymakers to formulate **a policy in line with Article 5.3 to combat TI**.
- Media stories on the importance of formulating a National Tobacco Control Policy contributed to initiate NTCP, which is now underway.
- Media stories also highlighted importance of tobacco control in achieving SDGs and implementing 8<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan.

#### **4.c Policy implementation**

- Huge media coverage has been contributing to popularize the TC law among stakeholders, which is ultimately helping implement the law.
- Enormous media coverage, particularly violation related media pieces, has been creating momentum to properly implement the law.

### **Strengths of ATMA**

ATMA has already emerged as a natural partner of PROGGA's earned media initiatives. It has also been partnering with sub-national Bloomberg Initiative (BI) grantees' tobacco control activities as a very effective pressure group to foster the TC movement in Bangladesh. Strengths of ATMA are:

#### **A Spontaneous Initiative**

- ATMA is different from the other journalists' networks formed in Bangladesh. The concept of establishing a tobacco control journalists' network was not pre-designed. The idea of such a platform came from the trainee journalists after the completion of training. So, it is a demand-driven and spontaneous force rather than an imposed one.

#### **Low Operational Cost**

- The network does not incur heavy operational cost. The office bearers (Convener and two co-conveners) and the member secretary of ATMA do not receive any financial benefit from the project. Also, the network members including 18 working committee members do not receive any financial benefits for reporting/ news coverage except some training allowances and logistics supports. Therefore, the network, with support from the secretariat, can run with a minimum operational cost.

#### **Inter-Personal Relationship**

- The key staff members of PROGGA, the ATMA secretariat, have long experience of working with journalists and have been maintaining continuous close inter-personal relationship with the network members beyond their professional tasks. This is very crucial to keep a network of skilled journalists alive.