



# Best Practices for Alcohol Policy Advocacy: The Role of National Alcohol Policy Alliances and Shadow Reporting

FORUT Civil Society Impact Series

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# Context & Rationale

Alcohol-related harm remains a significant public health and development challenge across Southern and West Africa. Civil society organizations (CSOs) in these regions, particularly National Alcohol Policy Alliances (NAPAs), have played a pivotal role in advocating evidence-based alcohol policies, often starting from ground zero. Their efforts have led to the drafting, adoption, and implementation of national alcohol policies in countries such as Zambia, Malawi, Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Ghana. It is also worth looking at the enabling environment and coordinating role of regional alcohol policy alliances (RAPAs) as critical to the success of national alcohol policy advocacy.

Shadow reporting—civil society-led monitoring and documentation of policy progress—has emerged as a strategic tool to hold governments accountable and sustain momentum in policy implementation. It is a type of political process monitoring to track and raise awareness about governments' progress towards compliance with international treaties or frameworks (National Democratic Institute, 2023).

Shadow reports complement official reports, provide alternative perspectives and critical analysis of the information in official government reports, for example in the implementation of human rights conventions (International Women's Rights Action Watch Asia Pacific, 2010; O'Neill Institute for National and Global Health Law and the InterAmerican Heart Foundation – Argentina, 2012). Shadow reports can highlight gaps, delays, or misrepresentations in government narratives. For NAPAs, shadow reporting is used to independently monitor and report on government progress in implementing alcohol control policies.

This FORUT Civil Society Impact Series publication captures lessons and best practices from the proceedings of the Alcohol, Drugs, and Development (ADD) Community of Practice (COP) webinar held on 27 August 2025 entitled “Lessons from the successes of alcohol policy advocacy in Southern and West Africa.” The webinar aimed to strengthen collaborations, build the capacity of regional alliances, and to promote knowledge sharing on alcohol policy and legislation development and implementation. With various civil society organizations from West and Southern Africa having successfully pushed for meaningful alcohol policy reforms, the webinar highlighted key insights and lessons learned from their advocacy efforts, highlighting effective strategies that have made a difference in their regions.

## **Alcohol, Drugs and Development Community of Practice**

The Alcohol, Drugs, and Development (ADD) Community of Practice (COP) is a knowledge exchange platform coordinated by FORUT's Alcohol, Drugs, and Development Programme. It was set up based on the needs of FORUT's implementing partners working on protecting people from the health and social harms from alcohol and drugs and strengthening systems to control alcohol and drugs. The ADD COP's activities include organizing knowledge sharing activities, including meetings and workshops for the COP and webinars for members of the public interested in alcohol and drug policy.

# Shadow Reporting for Alcohol Policy Advocacy

## Monitoring in the Global Alcohol Action Plan

Shadow reporting aligns with the WHO Global Alcohol Action Plan (GAAP) 2022–2030, which encourages civil society participation in monitoring and advocacy (WHO, 2024). The GAAP proposed that civil society organizations along with professional associations and academia:

*“...prioritize and strengthen their activities on reducing the harmful use of alcohol by motivating and engaging their stakeholders in implementation of the global strategy within existing partnerships or by developing new collaborative frameworks, as well as by promoting and supporting, within their roles and mandates, intersectoral and multisectoral collaboration and dialogue while monitoring and countering undue influences from commercial vested interests that undermine attainment of public health objectives (WHO, 2024).”*

Shadow reporting are useful tools for alcohol policy advocacy. Shadow reports can be linked to the monitoring and reporting process for the implementation of national alcohol policies, national alcohol laws, the Global Strategy to Reduce the Harmful Use of Alcohol, the SAFER Initiative, and more recently, the Global Alcohol Action Plan. Adequate planning and preparation for shadow reporting is thus necessary for civil society organisations that will be working collaboratively on producing a shadow report.

**Policy benchmarking.** For alcohol policy advocacy, using the WHO’s SAFER policy package as an indicator for public health-oriented alcohol policies to assess national policy content and implementation, will be useful for shadow reporting. Shadow reports provide a platform for comparing national efforts against the GAAP and regional frameworks.

**Timeline Audits.** For NAPAs, shadow reporting requires tracking policy and legislative development stages: from drafting, adoption to implementation. It helps identify delays and missed milestones, especially during political transitions.

**Legislative Mapping.** To monitor alcohol control regulations and bills through parliamentary processes, NAPAs need to document stakeholder engagement, amendments, and lobbying efforts.

**Stakeholder Analysis.** This is a critical part of shadow reporting. NAPAs should record participation of ministries, CSOs, and technical working groups in the shadow reporting process. This can help identify gaps in multisectoral coordination and civil society inclusion.

**Community Feedback.** This is important to evaluate the NAPA's shadow reporting process. Conducting surveys, focus groups, and interviews to gather grassroots perspectives on alcohol-related harm and policy effectiveness can add value to the shadow report's legitimacy and credibility.

**Media Monitoring.** This is recommended to track public discourse of the policy process and government responsiveness. This should involve critical analysis of media narratives around alcohol policy and industry influence.

**Dissemination of shadow reports.** Where policies are already being implemented, **annual civil society reports** can be published to assess national alcohol policy implementation. Such reports could include recommendations and specific calls to action. For quick reference, NAPAs can develop **scorecards and policy briefs** to highlight progress and gaps. This can be 2-page accessible executive summaries or policy briefs for sharing with the media, parliamentarians, and donors. It is critical that shadow reports are shared and submitted to relevant ministries with the national government, and conduct **briefings**, where possible.

**Strategic Timing and Advocacy Integration.** It is important to **align shadow reporting with political cycles**. This can ensure that the reports are timed around elections, budget planning, and legislative sessions. NAPAs can use political transitions as windows for renewed advocacy. NAPAs should also **leverage global and regional events** by releasing reports ahead of WHO Regional Committee meetings or World Health Assemblies and using global and regional forums to amplify national concerns.

**Capacity Building and Development of National Alcohol Policy Alliances.** For better coordination and **coalition governance**, it is recommended to develop memoranda of understanding to clarify roles and responsibilities within national alliances. This can also ensure diverse representation for inclusive and credible reporting within the NAPAs. It is also critical that NAPAs are **protected from industry interference**. NAPAs need to maintain transparency and evidence-based reporting to protect their credibility and legitimacy. NAPAs need to be prepared for potential backlash from governments or industry actors, before, during and after the shadow reporting.

### National Alcohol Policy Alliance

A national alcohol policy alliance (NAPA) is a registered and organised group of civil society organisations working at the community, local or national levels, with a secretariat and a coordinator, working towards promoting effective public health-focused alcohol policies, free from commercial interests.

# Examples of Shadow Reporting for Alcohol Policy Advocacy

The following snapshots of shadow reports below are based on the webinar proceedings. It also contains additional insights from the regional and national alcohol policy alliances involved in shadow reporting in the West African and Southern African regions where FORUT has implementing partners.

## West Africa

### Liberia

In 2025, the **Liberia Alcohol Policy Alliance (LAPA)** released a shadow report assessing national progress under the WHO Global Alcohol Action Plan, highlighting enforcement gaps, and urging legislative action. The shadow report emphasizes civil society's role in supporting Liberia's Ministry of Health in crafting Liberia's National Alcohol Policy and Strategy (2023-2033). Progress has stalled in its implementation since 2024 due to changes in government. Liberia Alcohol Policy Alliance continues to work with the Ministry of Health's Mental Health Unit and recommends the activation of the coordination mechanisms under the strategy, increase stakeholder awareness and prioritize policy execution (WAAPA and LAPA, 2025).

### Ghana

In 2026, the **Alcohol Policy Alliance – Ghana's (GhanAPA)** released a shadow report which highlighted the slow implementation of the 2016 National Alcohol Policy and called for a stronger multi-sector coordination and legislative action. Although Ghana has a National Alcohol Control Policy, implementation has been slow because of the absence of a supporting regulation especially for illicit and informal alcohol. Weak surveillance systems hinder tracking alcohol related harm. GhanAPA expressed its support for the Ministry of Health to drive policy implementation and urged the government to accelerate the passage of the alcohol control regulation, the establishment of the Alcohol Control Commission or Focal Point, improve surveillance systems, and better public education to reduce exposure to alcohol marketing (WAAPA and GhanAPA, 2026).

### Sierra Leone

There is no mechanism in place at national and international levels in tracking implementation of the GAAP. The Sierra Leone government has not developed and shared any progress report on the implementation of the GAAP. The **Sierra Leone Alcohol Policy Alliance (SLAPA)** developed the shadow report to remind government of its commitment to implement the Action Plan including the development and adoption of comprehensive alcohol control legislation. The report revealed that Sierra Leone has only achieved 20% of the eleven global targets and 5 Afro regional targets. SLAPA calls for urgent action by the government to address gaps, including financing its implementation.

## Southern Africa

### Malawi

Malawi has an implementation, evaluation, and monitoring strategy for its national alcohol policy. While Malawi successfully banned alcohol sold in small sachets, alcohol producers replaced the plastic sachets with small glass bottles to circumvent the ban. There is also lack of enforcement of the ban of homebrewed illicit alcohol which is compounded by the lack of regulation on sales hours of alcoholic beverages. Additionally, Malawi's implementation and evaluation strategy is already outdated. Moreover, the Liquor Act and the national alcohol policy need to be aligned. Such challenges were compounded by COVID19, the country's debt burden and natural disasters.

### Zambia

Zambia adopted its National Alcohol Policy (NAP) in 2018 after renewed advocacy in 2012 with FORUT support. The policy reflects a comprehensive nature. **SAAPA-Zambia** played a key role and continues to advocate for implementation. However, progress is limited due to lack of a monitoring baseline, COVID-19 disruptions, debt default, political changes in 2021, and climate disasters. Despite forming a National Multi-Sectorial Committee on the Implementation of the NAP, economic challenges persist. Alcohol consumption, especially among youth, is acknowledged, but implementation remains weak. SAAPA-Zambia urges establishing benchmarks and re-strategising to close gaps and strengthen policy execution.

Table 1. A snapshot of alcohol-related harms in Liberia, Ghana, Sierra Leone, Malawi and Zambia.

Country	Liberia	Ghana	Sierra Leone	Malawi	Zambia
<b>Population (2023)</b>	5,493,031	33,787,914	8,460,512	21,104,482	20,723,965
<b>World Bank income level</b>	Low-income	Lower-middle income	Low income	Low income	Lower-middle income
<b>Burden of non-communicable diseases (share of deaths)</b>	35%	46.8%	34.5%	39.6%	31.2%
<b>Alcohol per capita consumption (in litres of pure alcohol)</b>	3 (2020)	4.55 (2020)	0.26 (2020)	1.52 (2020)	3.56 (2020)
<b>Alcohol-attributable deaths (rate, per 100,000 population) (2023)</b>	15.49	12.81	11.40	9.93	11.06

Sources: World Health Organization (2026); Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (2026).

# Best Practices

Based on key insights extracted from the webinar proceedings and in consultation with the regional and national alcohol policy alliances that have conducted shadow reporting, the following practices are recommended for NAPAs embarking on the process of shadow reporting on alcohol policy.

## **1. Strategic advocacy through shadow reporting**

- Use shadow reporting to monitor government commitments and highlight gaps.
- Time and plan advocacy campaigns around political transitions and legislative windows to maximize impact.
- Engage parliamentary health committees and opposition leaders to build bipartisan support.

## **2. Building and sustaining momentum**

- Maintain consistent media engagement to keep alcohol policy on the public agenda.
- Co-develop implementation plans with respective agencies or authorities immediately after policy adoption to avoid delays and support implementation.
- CSOs must adopt a watchdog role to ensure accountability while maintaining collaborative relationships with government.

## **3. Invest in continuous training for advocacy**

- Invest in continuous training for CSOs on policy content, advocacy strategies, and technical standards.
- Facilitate cross-country learning exchanges to share experiences and strengthen regional solidarity.

## **4. Support strengthening of institutions**

- Advocate for clear institutional arrangements within ministries for policy implementation.
- Position alcohol policy under non-communicable disease units to ensure health system integration.

## **5. Managing Industry Influence**

- Establish clear conflict-of-interest policies to exclude industry actors from policy development.
- Document and expose industry interference through civil society reports and the media.

## **6. Leveraging Regional and Global Frameworks**

- Align national policies with WHO's Global Alcohol Action Plan and existing regional alcohol policy frameworks.
- Engage with regional bodies to elevate alcohol control on political agendas.

# Lessons Learned from Shadow Reporting

National alcohol policy alliances that have worked on shadow reports shared some lessons learned from the process and their experience. These are insightful reminders that shadow reporting is a process and not just an output. The following insights can be helpful to national alcohol policy alliances planning to start their own shadow reporting in their respective countries.

## 1. **Multi-sectoral coordination is key**

Inter-ministerial committees and technical working groups helped institutionalize policy processes.

## 2. **Policy development is iterative**

Policy advocacy is fraught with initiating and restarting policy development. Countries like Ghana went through multiple drafts (up to nine), reflecting the importance of persistence and consistent technical input.

## 3. **Civil society as catalysts**

NAPAs were instrumental in initiating policy development, often filling technical and advocacy gaps left by government actors.

## 4. **Civil society needs to challenge industry interference**

Alcohol industry influence was a major obstacle, especially in Ghana, requiring advocacies to push for the alcohol industry's exclusion from policy processes. Governments need regulations to protect public health policies from industry interference.

## 5. **Technical support is crucial**

Support from FORUT and the WHO in the form of technical training, exposure visits, and targeted capacity building was essential for effective advocacy. While this is vital, the value of incorporating local knowledge and expertise cannot be underestimated.

## 6. **Government Transitions Delay Progress**

In countries undergoing political transitions, changes in political leadership and civil service personnel often disrupted momentum for policy development and policy implementation.

## 7. **Funding Gaps Persist**

Most policy development and implementation efforts were funded by external partners. While this is helpful, the minimal or even lack of government budget allocation hampers effective implementation. Sustainable, long-term financial support is critical.

## Acronyms

CSOs	Civil society organizations
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
GAAP	Global Alcohol Action Plan
NAPA	National Alcohol Policy Alliance
RAPA	Regional Alcohol Policy Alliance
WAHO	West African Health Organization
WHO	World Health Organization
AU CDC	Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention

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# Annex A:

## Civil Society Shadow Report Template

This template was developed by the West African Alcohol Policy Alliance for the Framework for Implementing the Global Alcohol Action Plan 2022-2030 in the WHO African Region. It can be modified according to the context of the civil society organization embarking on the process to assess their country's progress in the implementation of the Global Alcohol Action Plan based on existing regional or national strategies, and the country that is being assessed. For countries without existing regional or national strategies, civil society organizations that belong to national alcohol policy alliances can initiate the development of a shadow report based on the Global Alcohol Action Plan.

NAPAs can use the conclusions to highlight international obligations and call for action. It is recommended that it references UN treaty body recommendations to reinforce advocacy messages and highlight government obligations under international law.

[The full template can be accessed in the West African Alcohol Policy Alliance webpage.](#)

### Key elements of the shadow report:

- Background
  - Country information
  - Demographics
  - Prevalence of alcohol use disorders
- Brief overview of the “Framework for implementing the Global Alcohol Action Plan 2022-2030 in the WHO African Region”.
- Main Shadow Report: Priority interventions and actions (PI &A) under review
  - Section 1: Establish partnerships and multisectoral coordination mechanisms (PI&A 34)
  - Section 2. Develop multisectoral alcohol harm reduction policies (PI&A 35)
  - Section 3: Develop and/or strengthen legislation and regulations (PI&A 36)
  - Section 4: Reduce the public health impact of illicitly or informally produced alcohol (PI&A 38)
  - Sections 5: Enforce measures to reduce the acceptability of alcohol (PI&A 39)
- Conclusion
  - Summary of key findings and recommendations
  - Call to action for governments, civil society, regional organizations, international and development partners, and other stakeholders in the regional and global levels
  - Brief information on WHO Country office efforts in supporting (country) on the implementation of the (regional/national) strategy



Template on the Development of Civil Society  
Organization (CSO) Shadow Report on the  
Implementation of the “Framework for  
Implementing the Global Alcohol Action Plan  
2022-2030 in the WHO African Region”

November 2024



[www.waapalliance.org](http://www.waapalliance.org)

# Annex B:

## Recommendations for further dissemination of the shadow report

It is recommended to disseminate the shadow report **beyond national government bodies**. This can include **submitting shadow reports to international bodies and relevant regional bodies**. For example, submitting the shadow report to permanent missions in Geneva (WHO) and New York (UN), the World Health Organization (WHO) and other relevant UN treaty bodies can be useful in gaining traction on alcohol policy monitoring and alcohol policy advocacy.

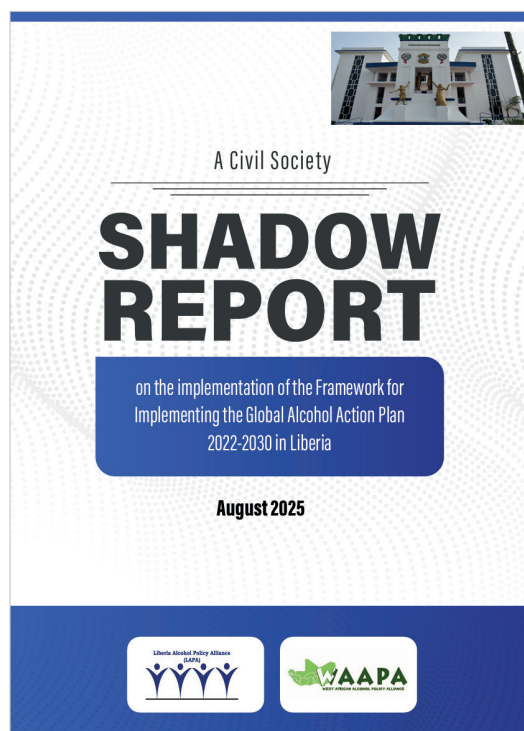
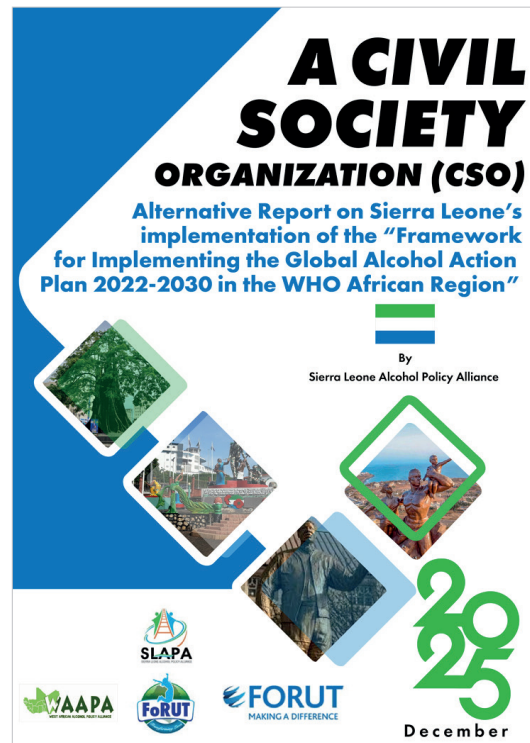
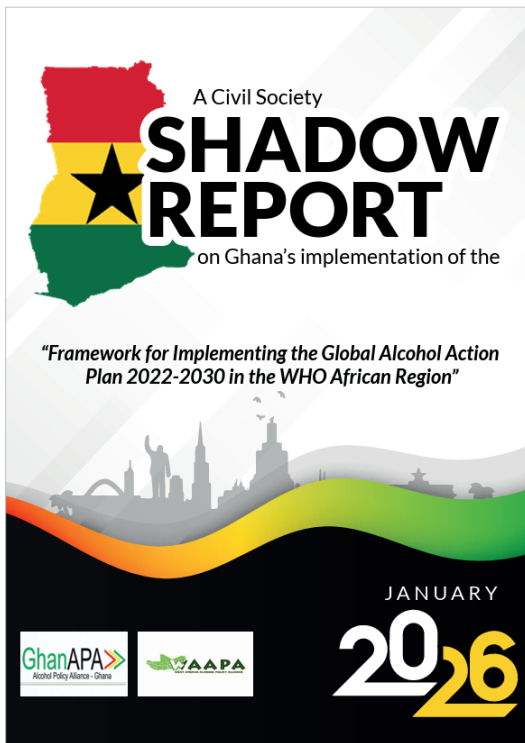
For countries in the African region, submit reports to relevant regional bodies including, but not limited to the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), West African Health Organization (WAHO), African Union Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (AU CDC).

For countries in the Asian region, submit to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Secretariat and the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation Secretariat, and other regional bodies that include public health in their strategies or priority agenda.

Where there are regional frameworks or strategies to implement the Global Alcohol Action Plan, **NAPAs can collaborate with the secretariats of their respective regional alcohol policy alliances** (e.g., West African Alcohol Policy Alliance, South African Alcohol Policy Alliance, Asia Pacific Alcohol Policy Alliance, Southeast Asia Alcohol Policy Alliance, Healthy Americas Coalition) for joint submissions to regional bodies. Such regional collaborations strengthen credibility and reach through multi-stakeholder input.

# Annex C:

## Examples of Published Shadow Reports from West Africa



# The Alcohol, Drugs and Development Programme in FORUT

The Alcohol, Drugs, and Development (ADD) programme addresses alcohol harm at multiple levels by supporting community mobilisation as well as advocacy at national, regional, and global levels to put in place alcohol policy and legislation. Experience and knowledge from the local level will inform national, regional, and global advocacy, as well as the other way around. The programme relies heavily on research and evidence on high-impact alcohol control policies and tools, the strength of the partnerships between civil society actors and authorities, and the drive towards cultural change through transformations of dominant norms and discourses.

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