



**Foundation for
Consumer Freedom
Advancement**

...the freedom to choose

FCFA POLICY PRIMER

Banned, Not Gone

What two decades of sachet alcohol bans across Africa tell
Nigeria about its own

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ABOUT THIS SERIES

FCFA Policy Primers are short, evidence-led briefings on consumer regulation in Africa. Each primer reviews the record, states what the evidence can and cannot show, and makes practical recommendations.

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Five things the record shows

- 01** **Nine months into Nigeria's ban** on alcohol in sachets and containers below 200 millilitres, NAFDAC seized banned drinks worth an estimated N300 million in three Lagos markets and found traders hoarding them "amid increased demand and rising prices."¹

- 02** **Six African countries** (Kenya, Malawi, Zambia, Tanzania, Uganda and Cameroon) have banned alcohol sachets since 2004. We found no case where a ban has been shown with solid data to reduce drinking or alcohol-related harm.

- 03** **The best-measured ban worked on shelves:** in Uganda, sachet availability in surveyed shops fell from 52 percent to 1.4 percent. But researchers warned drinkers may switch to informal alcohol, which may make up as much as 86 percent of all alcohol consumed in the country.¹³

- 04** **The trade moves rather than stops.** In Kenya, Malawi, Zambia and Tanzania, sachets gave way to five-litre containers decanted and resold, under-the-counter sales at double the price, spirits poured by the glass at bus stops, or homebrew.

- 05** **Bans can stall for years.** Cameroon's 2014 ban has seen three producer moratoria running to 2026 and was narrowed in 2023 to sachets under 50 millilitres.^{18, 19}



PART ONE

The state of sachet alcohol policy

Six bans, one reverse case, and what actually happened to the trade.

A ban that has driven the trade underground

In early October 2026, Nigeria's National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC) raided three Lagos markets: Ile-Epo, Ojuwoye in Mushin and Oke-Arin on Lagos Island. Officers seized sachet and small-bottle alcoholic drinks worth an estimated N300 million and arrested distributors and retailers. The agency's own preliminary finding was that traders were hoarding the banned products "amid increased demand and rising prices."¹

The raids followed months of enforcement against producers. In July 2026, NAFDAC sealed three factories in Ogun State. At one, officers found sachet alcohol still on the production machines and "uncountable 100ml alcoholic bottles."² In August, it ordered manufacturers to recall sachet and small-bottle alcoholic drinks nationwide, with the products to be destroyed at the companies' cost.³ On NAFDAC's own record, production and sale have carried on despite the ban.

The ban, which covers alcoholic drinks in sachets and in containers below 200 millilitres, had been in full effect since January 2026. Nine months later, NAFDAC's own finding points to rising demand, rising prices and a trade that has moved out of sight. Nigeria is not the first country on the continent to reach this point. This primer reviews the record of six African sachet bans, and one case that shows the same pattern in reverse, to ask what Nigeria should expect and what it should do instead.

The case for the ban, stated fairly

The reasons for the ban deserve to be taken seriously. Before the restriction, small sachets of high-strength spirits sold for very little, often through unlicensed outlets and often to minors. NAFDAC's director general, Prof. Mojisola Adeyeye, has said some sachets once contained 50 to 90 percent alcohol, and NAFDAC says about half of underage drinkers bought from outlets selling sachets and small bottles.^{4,5} In Malawi, pre-ban sachets cost the equivalent of 2 to 8 US cents.⁶

Cheap, concealable, high-strength alcohol sold to children is a real problem. The question this primer asks is narrower: does banning the sachet solve it?

The evidence gap

We found no African country where a sachet ban has been shown, with solid data, to have reduced drinking or alcohol-related harm. There are anecdotes, but no measurement of consumption before and after. What does exist is a consistent record of what happened to the market once the sachet was gone.

The newest evidence points the same way. A July 2026 preprint by Stirling researchers and partners (Uny et al.), based on 18 focus group discussions held in Malawi and Uganda between December 2023 and July 2024, found that the sachet bans "produced significant market displacement rather than meaningful reductions in alcohol availability." Participants said the bans worked at first, but "this effectiveness seemed to last only a short while" before substitutes spread: small bottles of high-strength spirits of up to 220 ml, and widely available homebrews, which the authors note can be adulterated with substances such as methanol, often sold without age checks.⁷

The authors conclude that policies aimed at a single product type are "unlikely to have lasting effects unless they form part of a broader and more coherent strategy," and they note that their findings are relevant to Nigeria. The study is a preprint and has not yet been peer reviewed. It is also qualitative: it reports what people in the communities observed, not measured consumption.

How this primer searched the evidence

We searched peer-reviewed databases, government and institutional publications, and reputable media for material on sachet alcohol bans in Africa published between 2004, when Kenya introduced the first ban, and October 2026. To count as solid data on whether a ban reduced drinking, a study had to measure consumption or alcohol-related harm before and after the ban. Kenya's National Authority for the Campaign Against Alcohol and Drug Abuse (NACADA) national surveys track general alcohol and drug use, but they are not designed to measure the effect of the sachet ban, so they do not meet that bar.⁸

KENYA

The first ban, and the "family pack"

Kenya went first. In June 2004 the government banned the sale of alcohol in sachets. The rule was later written into the Alcoholic Drinks Control Act of 2010, which bars any alcoholic drink in a container smaller than 250 millilitres and requires spirits to be sold in glass, PET or metal containers.⁹

A University of Nairobi research project on the aftermath records what manufacturers did next. Soon after the ban they rolled out five-litre packs at KSh 900, branded as "family packs," arguing that drinking at home would keep alcohol away from children.¹⁰ The sachet disappeared, and the same alcohol came back in a bigger container.

Table 1. Sachet alcohol bans in Africa and what followed

COUNTRY	BAN	WHAT HAPPENED NEXT
Kenya	June 2004; Alcoholic Drinks Control Act 2010 bars containers under 250 ml	Five-litre "family packs" sold at KSh 900
Malawi	Standards action from 2010; High Court ruling January 2017	Five-litre bottles decanted and repacked; peer-reviewed study calls ban "ineffective"
Zambia	April 2012; 60 ml "tujilijili" sachets	Under-the-counter sales at double the price; homebrewed kachasu as substitute
Tanzania	March 2017	Strong spirits sold by the glass at bus stops for TSh 500 to TSh 2,000
Uganda	May 2019	Shelf availability fell from 52% to 1.4%; drinking levels not measured
Cameroon	September 2014	Three moratoria running to 2026; ban narrowed to under 50 ml in 2023
Rwanda	Ban on locally produced spirits	Smuggled sachets became the substitute, now three for Rwf 1,000

Sources: endnotes 6 and 9 to 20.

MALAWI

The longest battle

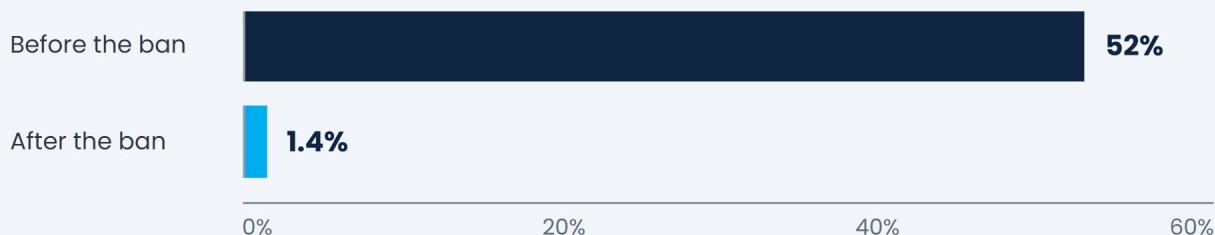
Malawi fought over this for the better part of a decade. Its Bureau of Standards first moved against sachet and plastic-bottle spirits in 2010. Manufacturers went to court and won injunctions. In January 2017 the High Court finally ruled that making and selling liquor in sachets and plastic bottles is illegal.¹¹

Within months, the national press reported that sellers had switched to five-litre bottles, selling the contents "so cheap at any quantity and amount."¹² A peer-reviewed study of Malawian adolescents found that manufacturers now sell in bulk, "5 l and above," which vendors repack to suit each customer's pocket. Its conclusion was that aggressive packaging, marketing and weak enforcement "rendered the ban ineffective through increased affordability and availability to different income population groups and the underage."⁶

The best-studied case, and its warning

Uganda's May 2019 ban is the most rigorously measured. Researchers who observed 100 retail outlets in Kampala and Jinja found sachet availability fell from 52 percent before the ban to 1.4 percent after.¹³ That is a real enforcement achievement.

Figure 1. Share of surveyed Ugandan shops selling alcohol sachets



Source: Smart et al., 2021; 100 outlets in Kampala and Jinja.

The study measured what was on shelves, not what people drank.

The same researchers warned that banning sachets "may lead consumers to resort to other forms of low-cost alcohol, such as informal alcohol," which "may account for as much as 86% of all alcohol consumed in Uganda." Whether Ugandans drink less today, nobody has shown.

ZAMBIA AND TANZANIA

The trade finds a way around

Zambia banned its 60-millilitre "tujilijili" sachets, many above 40 percent alcohol, in April 2012. Within weeks, remaining stock was being sold under the counter at double the price, while homebrewed kachasu stayed on offer as the obvious substitute.¹⁴

Tanzania banned sachets in March 2017. A 2024 peer-reviewed study of the country's alcohol policy found street vendors had worked around the ban by selling strong spirits in small glasses at bus stops for TSh 500 to TSh 2,000, easily within reach of adolescents. The most common products, it found, "remain affordable even for those without reliable income."¹⁵

CAMEROON

Twelve years of deadlines

Cameroon banned the sale of sachet whisky in September 2014, giving producers two years to comply. When the grace period ran out in September 2016, ministers met producers behind closed doors and passed the question to the Prime Minister.¹⁶

Moratorium followed moratorium. In 2022, eight years after the decree, sachets still seemed to be "everywhere" in Yaoundé and Douala, hanging from sunshades outside small shops and stacked by street sellers "alongside powdered milk and sweets for children."¹⁷ A joint ministerial order signed on 18 December 2022 extended the producers' moratorium four years to 2026, the third such extension.¹⁸ In April 2023 the government narrowed the ban to sachets under 50 millilitres, leaving slightly larger ones legal.¹⁹ In October 2024 the industry minister was still holding to a 2026 date for full migration to bottles.¹⁸ Twelve years after the ban, the sachet market is still trading.

RWANDA

The same lesson in reverse

Rwanda shows the pattern from the other side. After it banned locally produced spirits, sachets became the substitute: smuggled in from neighbouring countries, delivered by motorcycle at night, and now cheaper than before, three for Rwf 1,000 against Rwf 500 for one.²⁰ Ban one cheap product and demand moves to the next.

Unregulated production also carries dangers of its own. In September 2026, an illegal kanyanga still exploded in Rwamagana District, killing a 20-year-old and injuring three others, two of them aged 14 and 16.²¹ Illegal distilling in Rwanda predates the ban, so the explosion is not evidence of the ban's effect. It is a reminder of the risks of alcohol made outside any regulated system.

CONSUMER IMPACT

What bans do to the consumer

Prices

Every case above shows the banned product becoming scarcer and dearer while demand holds: double the price under the counter in Zambia and, by NAFDAC's account, rising prices in Lagos. Supporters will say higher prices are the point. They would be, if drinkers simply drank less. The record shows that the poorest drinkers instead buy a measure poured from a five-litre jug, a smuggled sachet, or homebrew.

Pack size is also a question of who can afford to buy. Many Nigerian households buy everyday goods in sachets, from drinking water to detergent and powdered milk, because a small pack is what the day's cash allows. A rule that removes the smallest legal size of a product falls hardest on the people who buy in the smallest amounts. That does not make the harm from cheap spirits any less real, but it is a cost that any honest review of the ban should count.

Safety

A regulated sachet carries a manufacturer's name, a stated strength and a regulator's registration. A measure decanted from a jug, a smuggled sachet or a homebrew carries none of these. The Rwamagana explosion is a reminder that illicit production carries risks of its own, beyond what is in the glass.

Young people

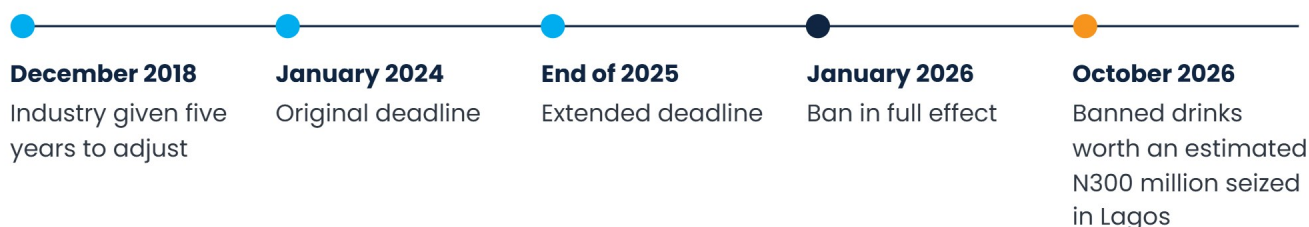
The ban exists to protect minors. Yet in Malawi, researchers found the ban ineffective in part because alcohol stayed available "to the underage," and in Tanzania spirits by the glass remained "easily within reach of adolescents."^{6, 15} Removing one package did not remove access.

NIGERIA

The policy challenge in Nigeria

Nigeria's path to this ban took seven years: a December 2018 agreement giving industry five years to adjust, a January 2024 deadline, an extension to the end of 2025 after National Assembly intervention, a reported federal pause for consultations, and full effect from January 2026. Industry associations were required to sign irrevocable undertakings to stop production.^{22, 23}

Figure 2. Nigeria's road to the sachet ban



Sources: endnotes 1, 22 and 23.

After seven years of negotiation, the first major enforcement finding is that the banned trade is thriving underground. The Manufacturers Association of Nigeria warns of N1.9 trillion in threatened investment and over 500,000 direct jobs.²³ That claim is industry advocacy, not verified fact, but it gives a sense of the disruption involved.

The World Health Organization's SAFER package, launched in 2018, lists five interventions it considers most cost-effective against alcohol harm.²⁴ Two of them are restricting the availability of alcohol and raising its price through excise taxes, and a sachet ban can be read as a form of both: it takes a product off the shelf and pushes drinkers towards dearer packs. But a packaging ban is not what SAFER's evidence base supports. That evidence concerns enforced rules on who can buy alcohol, and where and when, and taxes that raise the price of alcohol across the market. Enforcement and measurement sit at the centre of that approach. Nigeria's sachet ban, so far, has neither a measure of drinking nor evidence that underage access has fallen.

A policy whose verified achievements stop at shelf availability, while consumption goes unmeasured and the illicit trade grows, deserves scrutiny.



PART TWO

Policy recommendations

A results-first approach to underage and unsafe drinking.

RECOMMENDATIONS

A results-first approach to underage and unsafe drinking

If the goal is to protect young people rather than to be seen protecting them, the evidence points to the following steps.

RECOMMENDATION 1

Measure drinking, not just seizures

Addressed to: NAFDAC, with the National Bureau of Statistics

Commission a national survey of alcohol consumption, including underage drinking and informal and homebrewed alcohol, and repeat it at fixed intervals. Seizure values show enforcement activity. Only consumption and harm data can show whether the ban is protecting anyone.

RECOMMENDATION 2

Enforce age-of-sale rules where the sale happens

Addressed to: NAFDAC and state and local government licensing authorities

Direct enforcement at the point of sale, through test purchases, licence penalties for outlets that sell to minors, and clear age-check signage. This targets the harm the ban was meant to address and follows the WHO's emphasis on enforced availability rules that protect vulnerable groups.

RECOMMENDATION 3

Track and test the substitute market

Addressed to: NAFDAC and the Standards Organisation of Nigeria

Monitor the decanting and resale of bulk spirits and the sale of homebrew, and test seized and street products for strength and methanol. The record in Malawi, Zambia, Tanzania and Rwanda shows this is where demand goes once the sachet is gone.

RECOMMENDATION 4

Review the ban against its results within 12 months

Addressed to: National Assembly committees on health and on industry

Require a public review of the ban's effect on underage drinking, illicit trade and consumer safety. If the evidence does not show results, consider legal, regulated small formats with strength limits, registration and strict age-of-sale enforcement, so that the market is not handed to unregistered products.

This is different from what Uny et al. found manufacturers already doing to get around bans, such as 100 ml and 200 ml PET bottles in Uganda and 330 ml "baby gin" bottles in Malawi. Those are unregulated workarounds, not formats designed and policed by the regulator.⁷ Cameroon's twelve years of moratoria show the cost of leaving a policy unreviewed.

CONCLUSION

Learn from the neighbours before celebrating the ban

The problem Nigeria's sachet ban targets is real. But across Kenya, Malawi, Zambia, Tanzania, Uganda and Cameroon, bans removed the cheapest regulated option from the shelf while the trade moved into bigger containers, black markets and homebrew. Nowhere has a ban been shown to reduce drinking.

Consumers, including the poorest ones, deserve policies judged by their results. On the results so far, the sachet ban is a scarcity machine. The first step is simple: NAFDAC should start measuring whether Nigerians, and young Nigerians in particular, are drinking less. Nigeria should learn from its neighbours before celebrating its own ban.

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ABOUT FCFA

About the Foundation for Consumer Freedom Advancement

The Foundation for Consumer Freedom Advancement is a pan-African policy advocacy organisation championing consumer autonomy across tobacco harm reduction, food and beverage policy, and the digital economy. FCFA works with policymakers, the media, and development partners to ensure that consumer regulation in Africa is evidence-based, proportionate, and respectful of consumer choice.

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