

Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition's accreditation as NGO deferred by WHO

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NEW DELHI: The [World Health Organisation](#) (WHO) has deferred the application of the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN) for official accreditation as an NGO seeking more information about its links with the global food industry.

GAIN calls itself a Geneva-based non-profit foundation that works to reduce malnutrition. However, its membership includes major good giants such as Pepsico, [Nestle](#), Danone, Kraft, Ajinomoto and Coca Cola. Hence the WHO's Standing Committee on Nongovernmental Organisations (NGOs), decided to postpone consideration of application for admission into official relations from GAIN and sought further "information concerning the nature and extent of the Alliance's links with the global food industry, and the position of the Alliance with regard to its support and advocacy of WHO's nutrition policies, including infant feeding and marketing of complementary foods".

On Tuesday, the Standing Committee on NGOs (consisting of 5 countries: Armenia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Seychelles and Ecuador), which was considering other applications along with GAIN's application for NGO official relations status with WHO, admitted several others NGOs including Global Alliance for Rabies Control Inc., WaterAid, the Worldwide Network for Blood and Marrow Transplantation, the European Society for Medical Oncology and so on.

The International Baby Food Action Network (IBFAN), a global network that works to protect infant health by strengthening independent, transparent and effective controls on the baby [food industry](#) states that GAIN is a new type of public private entity which works to open up markets for its 600 partner companies, including the biggest food multinationals. It had protested against GAIN requesting official accreditation as an NGO entering into official relations with WHO stating that GAIN was not an NGO but a BINGO (business-friendly international NGO or big international NGO).

It is illogical for Member States (of [the WHO](#)) to allow such a controversial accreditation to go through while they are demanding more clarity on WHO's conflicts of interest procedures, said IBFAN. "Moreover, this application comes just as WHO is working on the guidelines for the marketing of complementary foods - a key policy issue that GAIN is keen to influence," said a statement issued by IBFAN. It added that WHO Member States need to ensure that WHO is working impartially in the interests of public health and that the NGOs WHO collaborates with are committed to working to that end.

Incidentally, GAIN has been partnering with the [Indian Government](#) and several other governments on the issue of malnutrition. The issue of its links with the global food industry has been raised by nutrition experts and activists in India and abroad as an example of conflict of interest as many of the member companies have been charged with activities undermining breastfeeding and promoting commercially produced complementary foods in place of locally available culture-specific solutions.