

Opening the door to Business lobbying - what's wrong with the new WHO policy proposals

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WHO has published a draft proposal for a [Framework and set of policies to address its engagement with Non State Actors](#) (NSAs). Member States are being invited to discuss these proposals at WHO's HQ in Geneva on 27th and 28th March. Public Interest NGOs are not invited. IBFAN has been following the process closely and finds serious flaws, inconsistencies and contradictions in the proposals.

Despite the many statements of WHO's Director General, Margaret Chan, that WHO's policies, norms and standards setting processes should be protected from commercial influence, if the new proposals were to be adopted, the corporate influence would increase. IBFAN fears that this would compromise WHO's integrity, independence and its ability to fulfil its mandate.

In particular, the proposals introduce a new risky element, allowing Official Relations status, with all its related privileges, for International Business Associations. Up to now, if businesses wanted to attend governing body meetings in order to lobby Member States delegations, they could wear a public badge, or, if they wanted to speak, inveigle their way onto government delegations. Some, over the years have slipped through WHO's admission procedures, pretending to be NGOs.ⁱ The new proposals open the door wide to participation by any business member of these Associations, except tobacco or arms companies. This would, in effect, legitimize businesses lobbying role at WHO's global policy-setting meetings - the very thing that WHO alleges that it is trying to avoid. In addition to turning WHO governing bodies meetings into multi-stakeholder public-private gatherings, the proposals would also allow businesses greater engagement at programme level, through agreed 3-year plans with WHO.

Lida Lhotska, IBFAN NGO Liaison to WHO says: "If these new policy proposals are adopted, IBFAN fears that WHO will be unable to lead and support Member States in taking the bold decisions necessary to tackle global health challenges. For example, irresponsible marketing is a major underlying cause of Non Communicable Diseases (NCDs). In tackling NCDs, acknowledged to be a major threat to public health, will WHO prefer to engage in partnerships with corporations, who would prefer campaigns for promoting 'slightly better for you products' – or will WHO help Member States bring in legally-binding controls that truly protect right to health of their citizens?"

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Lida Lhotska, IBFAN's WHO Liaison Office: lida.lhotska@gifa.org

Patti Rundall: Co-Chair of IBFAN Global Council: prundall@babymilkaction.org

ⁱ Business front groups that have managed to gain Official NGO status: **International Special Dietary Foods Industries** (ISDI, represents the baby feeding industry and lost its status in [January 2014](#), **Croplife International** (representing Monsanto, Syngenta, and other GMO technology companies), **International Life Sciences Institute** (ILSI, representing food and pharma companies) and the **Industry Council for Development** (representing Nestlé, Mars, Unilever and Ajinomoto). Another business entity that would benefit from the proposals is the [International Food and Beverage Business Alliance](#) (representing Nestlé, Pepsi, Mars, Coca Cola, Unilever and other food giants). IFBA members sign up to 5 commitments: 1. Reformulate and develop new products that support the goals of improving diets; 2. Provide clear and fact-based nutrition information to all consumers; 3. Extend responsible advertising and marketing initiatives to children globally; 4. Promote balanced diets and healthy, active lifestyles; and 5. Actively support public-private partnerships that support the WHO 2004 Global Strategy on Diet, Physical Activity and Health. If translated into a 3 year plan, these would push WHO towards public-private partnerships and 'responsible advertising' of 'slightly better for you junk food.'

Note: In 2014 an [EU Action Plan on Childhood Obesity](#) 2014-2020 was passed. Among the 8 actions considered 'doable' was a no food and drink sponsorship in schools rule. Food and advertising industries wanted a larger role in its development but the Commission (DGSANCO) and Member States stressed the importance of governments staying in the 'Drivers Seat' on matters relating to health. ([Click here](#))