



*International Baby Food Action Network*  
*Red internacional de grupos pro alimentación infantil*  
*Réseau international des groupes d'action pour l'alimentation infan*

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1998 RECIPIENT OF THE RIGHT LIVELIHOOD AWARD

**GUIDANCE FOR IBFAN GROUPS AND MEMBERS  
ON PARTICIPATION IN EVENTS SPONSORED FULLY OR PARTIALLY BY  
COMPANIES WITH COMMERCIAL INTEREST  
IN INFANT AND YOUNG CHILD FEEDING**

IBFAN aims to work together to bring about lasting improvement in infant and young child feeding practices. We pledge explicitly to neither seek nor accept any funds, donations, gifts or sponsorship by the manufacturers or distributors of breastmilk substitutes, of commercial baby foods and products related to infant and young child feeding<sup>1</sup>. Any relationship with industries related to infant feeding that creates a conflict of interest may damage IBFAN's ability to advocate for women's rights to impartial information on infant feeding; its ability to support sound infant feeding practices and its work on holding corporations accountable through legal measures.

IBFAN as a knowledge-based network, keeps up with the latest research findings – both basic and operational – by constantly and actively searching for relevant information. This includes participation in meetings, seminars and conferences, either in the IBFAN member's professional capacity or explicitly as an IBFAN representative.

In some instances, such events may be fully or partially sponsored by industries from different sectors and the decision whether or not to participate is not always easy. The following suggestions provide some guidance to assist with this type of decision-making.



**Events sponsored fully or partially by  
companies with commercial interest in infant and young child feeding**

In many countries, there are no legal or institutional prohibitions on infant food companies ability to sponsor seminars, promotional events and conferences. However, there is a moral imperative to avoid conflict of interest . The WHA resolution 58.32 (2005) urges Member States "to ensure that financial support and other incentives for programmes and health professionals working in infant and young child health do not create conflict of interest".

IBFAN members' participation in industry-sponsored events raises some considerations along the risk/benefit lines. The following questions may help weighing pros and cons of any such participation as attendant, speaker or exhibitor.

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<sup>1</sup> It is highly recommended that this rule also apply to the following sectors: tobacco, arms, alcohol, mining, pharmaceutical, oil.....

### **In considering the event ...**

- Have we contacted the event's organizers to let him know why we object to the sponsorship and provided suggestions for independent means to fund the event?
- Do we know what the industry sponsorship is used for (printing of programme, bringing in speakers etc.)
- Can we make ensure the sponsorship is not directly "benefiting" us? (meals, gifts etc.)
- Will our participation compromise our ability to be a critical voice for breastfeeding protection?

### **And, if we go ...**

- Do we endorse the company practices and the sponsorship?
- Do we transfer our good image onto the company and/or the event itself
- Can our participation be used against us in the future?
- Will our participation send out mixed messages about our expressed principles and what we do in practice?
- Is the meeting likely to provide information, contacts, opportunities for learning and interaction with key actors not available elsewhere or in other ways?
- Shall we make any difference through our technical/strategic presentations and interventions and/or by raising awareness of the sponsorship and conflicts of interest issues?
- As a speaker, will we have an opportunity to publicly express our discontent with the sponsorship in a noticeable manner e.g. in a keynote speech or on a panel?
- Can we prevent that our speech/abstract may be used/published in companies' material or in conference announcements or reports, which also contain advertisement by companies.

If the final decision is **NO, we will not attend**, we should try to make the ethical reasons behind our decision known to the organizers and also use the reasons for our opposition in public as an awareness raising activity (e.g. a stall in front of the conference building, an article in a newspaper etc.).

If the decision is **YES, we will attend**, we should explain why and under what conditions we made the decision and what precautions we took to avoid sending out mixed messages about IBFAN. This explanation should be shared with the relevant Regional Coordinating Office. Collecting, analyzing and reflecting on individual cases are critically important. It will help the whole network to learn from each other and to help each other in making these difficult decisions.



### **An additional suggestion regarding participation in events sponsored fully or partially by other companies**

Participation in such events also raises some considerations and the following point may be useful to consider:

- Is the sponsoring company subject to any public-interest NGO campaign or boycotts for its abuses regarding labour, environment or human rights either in the country where the event is taking place or elsewhere in the world? If the company were under some heavy criticism, it would be important to discuss IBFAN participation in the event with the NGO involved in the campaign to ensure we are not undermining campaigns of others.