

Title: Identifying effective ways to monitor and assess the political activity of the food industry

Type of session: Interactive Presentations

Contributor details:

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Purpose:

The purpose of this workshop is to present methods and tools used to monitor and assess the political activities of the food industry globally, and identify specific mechanisms to promote improved transparency in this area. The workshop will include presentation of relevant data collected from four countries using diverse methods. The workshop will appeal to all those interested in public health nutrition, including policy makers, researchers and advocates. The chair will encourage lively participation from the audience in contributing their own experiences and suggesting solutions for different contexts internationally. Potential for expanding monitoring to additional countries will also be discussed.

Motivation:

Technical content: There is growing concern that the political activity of the food industry, particularly large transnational food companies, could pose a risk to efforts to prevent diet-related non-communicable diseases. Corporate practices (such as lobbying of policy makers; framing of information; and constituency building in the community, in government and in the media) contributes to the way public discourse is framed and is likely to impact on the nature of laws and regulations proposed, developed and implemented.

We have recently proposed a framework for categorising the different strategies of the food industry, and an innovative approach for monitoring these practices using publicly available information. In this workshop we present the results of efforts to monitor corporate political activities in four countries (Australia, New Zealand, Fiji and France). The principal aims of the workshop are to determine how best to assess political activity of companies from a public health perspective, and identify specific mechanisms and strategies to promote improved transparency in this area. Boyd Swinburn, co-chair of The Lancet Commission on Obesity and leader of the INFORMAS (International Network for Food and Obesity / non-communicable Diseases Research, Monitoring and Action Support) initiative, will chair this session and ensure its outcomes are relevant and complementary to other global policy and advocacy initiatives.

Stefanie Vandevijvere will introduce the topic and provide an overview of the INFORMAS methods for monitoring the private sector, as well as other closely related initiatives in the area (10 minutes). Melissa Mialon will present results of two years of work monitoring food company practices in Australia, Fiji and France (20 minutes). Marcela Reyes will discuss her work examining the behaviour of food companies in Chile in 2016 in relation to the labelling & advertising law (10 minutes).

Process: After the invited presentations, the audience will be invited to contribute their own experiences on methods for monitoring and assessing corporate behaviour, as well as advocacy strategies in this area. The focus will be on (1) how best to assess political activity of companies, (2) identifying specific mechanisms to promote improved transparency in this area, and (3) opportunities to expand monitoring to more countries. The chair will facilitate this session. While we expect lively participation in this highly topical area, in order to guide discussion we will pre-prepare different options for ranking companies and practices, as well as a list of country best practices in relation to transparency (in various domains) to serve as audience prompts.

Tangible outcomes: (1) Preferred methods for assessing political activity of companies (for in-country and cross-country comparisons); (2) List of specific mechanisms to promote improved transparency in this area, with reference to global best practice, including advocacy strategies to implement these mechanisms in target countries; (3) Contact list of researchers / public health nutritionists interested in implementing monitoring of food companies in a range of countries.

Disclosure of conflict of interest: The contributors declare no potential conflicts of interest.