

COI in public health policymaking

||Workshop motivations & objectives||



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The HD4HL M3T Retreat

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Hephzibah Christian Center, Aburi, Ghana

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Disclosures



- I have no conflicts of interest to declare for this presentation
- **PI:** MEALS4NCDs, HD4HL, A4H Projects
- **Co-I:** AfriFOODlinks Project
- **Consultancy:** AGRA, AKADEMIYA2063 – FS-TIP
- **Volunteer:** Food Systems Dialogue Curator – gov't of Ghana



Scope

Public Health Nutrition
Policymaking: The Context

The HD4HL Policy Bundle

Objective of the Workshop

Food industry influence on
public health policy

Context

- **Food and nutrition policy-making**, irrespective of setting, is acknowledged as a **complex process**; it depends on many factors and actors
- Multi-stakeholder inclusivity philosophy
- eg public policy-making **frameworks require active or passive contribution of diverse actors** – (including civil society, academia, and the private sector) to government policy efforts.



To engage or to not?

- Obvious benefits to adhering to the principle of multi-stakeholder inclusivity
- **The interactions do present a range of governance and ethical challenges particularly when stakeholders have vested interests.**
- For public health nutrition policymaking, engagement with non-state actors who have vested interests should be a **desideratum rather than a requirement.**
- Debates regarding terms of engagement with the food industry in public health nutrition policy making are particularly contentious (Collin et al 2017; Cullerton et al 2019; Cullerton et al 2020; Hawkes and Buse, 2011)

BiG Food ...

Naïve if not foolish to underestimate the enormity of this challenge.

Neither nature, nor human evolution, nor fate has created the current burdens of chronic diseases... Rather, human decisions made in corporate boardrooms

LETHAL BUT LEGAL



**CORPORATIONS, CONSUMPTION,
AND PROTECTING PUBLIC HEALTH**

LETHAL BUT LEGAL



**CORPORATIONS, CONSUMPTION,
AND PROTECTING PUBLIC HEALTH**

NICHOLAS FREUDENBERG

Dre Mélissa MIALON

BIG FOOD & CIE

COMMENT LA RECHERCHE DU PROFIT
À TOUT PRIX NUIT À NOTRE SANTÉ

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Food industry influence on public health policy



Long term influence

The food industry tries to shape the wider policy environment, before a policy is even discussed



Reactive interference

The food industry tries to avoid or delay the introduction of unfavourable public health policy



Influence after the introduction of public health policy

The food industry tries to revert the decision to introduced a new public health policy



Food industry influence on public health policy

Examples of long term influence

- Builds relationships with decision-makers (donations, lobbying, etc.) & civil society organizations
- Shape the evidence that might be used in policy
- Promote self-regulation and voluntary initiatives to keep mandatory regulation off the policy agenda
- Shape the framing of issues and solutions

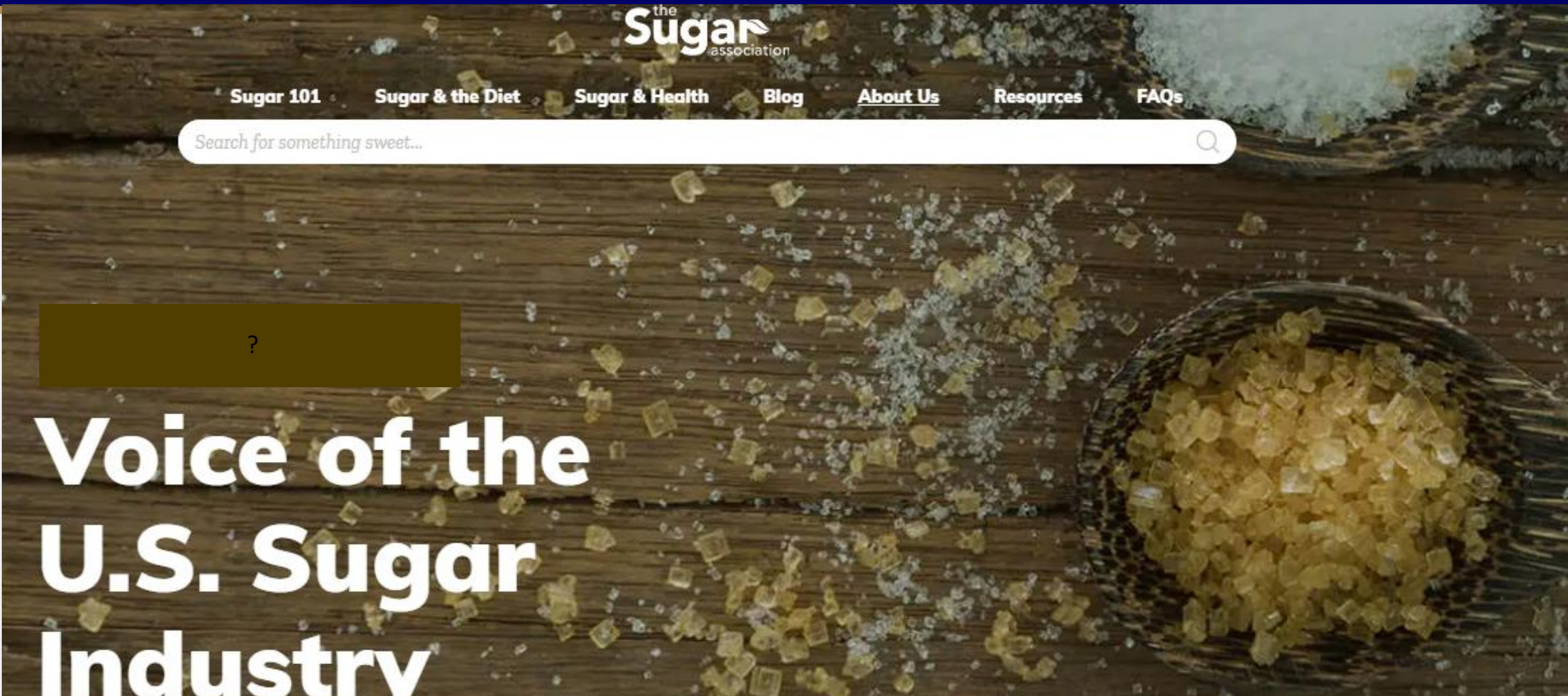
Examples of Reactive interference

- Lobbying
- Use connections with former members of the industry now in decision-making positions
- Promote self-regulation and voluntary initiatives instead of mandatory regulation
- Threaten to litigate if public policy is adopted

Examples post policy introduction interference

- Lobbying
- Undertake legal action at the national, regional or/and global level
- Do not comply with the law

So if sugar is just a carb what is the problem?
It depends on who you ask



?

**Voice of the
U.S. Sugar
Industry**

Sugar/soft drinks and obesity

Is there any association between sugar/soft drinks consumption and obesity?

“There is no association between sugar consumption and obesity.”

Richard Adamson

Scientist for National Soft Drink Association

BMJ 326, March, 2003

- Each additional sugar-sweetened drink increase over a 19 month follow-up

– OR for obesity 1.6 (95% CI: 1.14-2.24)

Ludwig et al. Lancet 2001

To engage? how? & what stage of the process?

- The nature and source of input, as well as the stage of the policy making process need to be considered.
 - eg consultation phase
 - eg policy decision-making phase
 - eg implementation phase

To engage? how? & what stage of the process?

- As long as the consultation phase is transparent, involving all relevant stakeholders (including food industry representatives) may be acceptable (Cullerton et al 2020),
- The policy decision-making phase should primarily involve government policy officers and decision-makers, with input from independent scientists (without conflicts of interest)
- The implementation phase will necessarily involve all relevant stakeholders (including co-operation from representatives of the food industry) (Cullerton et al 2020).
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To engage? how? & what stage of the process?

Rules of engagement?

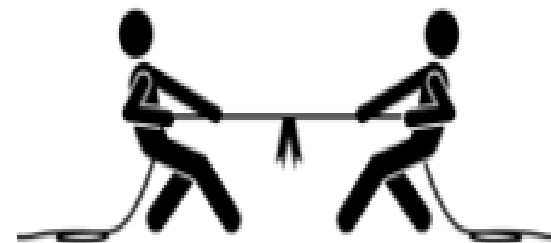
- While some argue that there should be **no space whatsoever for entities that promote commercial determinants of health (CDOH) to contribute to efforts that aim at limiting their profits or degrees of freedom to exploit** (Labonte, 2022), others believe that there are **opportunities for engagement**.
- If such engagements must be had, **then adequate rules are needed**.
- To help countries navigate these challenges, the WHO developed tools for addressing and managing conflicts of interest (WHO, 2017).

HD4HL: our baby steps at policy bundling, engaging stakeholders and COI



The HD4HL project

- The “[HD4HL Project](#)” seeks to develop a NPS and apply it in food-based policies
- M3T comprising representatives from relevant MDAs, academia, civil society, and international experts + private sector actors
- M3Ts might face resistance from food industry actors, who usually oppose the introduction of public policies that could restrict the sales of food and drink products
- To address/manage undue corporate influence and Col in such processes, an awareness-raising activity - workshop



Objectives of the workshop are to:

- help raise awareness of the governance and ethical challenges (including COI) germane to nutrition policy-related public-private interactions – as in the HD4HL Project;
- contribute to strengthening the governance and the ethics of engagement between the private sector and public health professionals / policy makers in Ghana
- inform the M3T on how to best protect the development of public policy actions from undue industry influence and CoI during the lifecycle of the HD4HL Project.

COMMENTARY | [VOLUME 36, 100908, JUNE 01, 2021](#)

PDF [263 KB]

The role of food environment policies in making unhealthy foods unattractive and healthy foods available in Africa

[Amos Laar, PhD](#)

[Open Access](#) • Published: May 21, 2021 • DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eclinm.2021.100908>

- The peculiar heterogeneity of the African food environments and its variegated political economies are noteworthy....
- Facing a syndemic of undernutrition, overweight/obesity and other diet-related NCDs, enforcing policies that dis-incentivize consumption of unhealthy diets, but also those that avail healthy/nutrient-rich foods are important.

