

Alliance Against Conflict of Interest (AACI)

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January 14, 2020

Dr. Balram Bhargava
DG Indian Council of Medical Research
V. Ramalingaswami Bhawan
Ansari Nagar, New Delhi - 110029

Sub: Sponsorship of the survey on sugar consumption by ILSI-Concerns

Dear Prof. Bhargava,

We, the Alliance against Conflicts of Interest (AACI), an alliance of organisations and individuals working in various sectors – doctors, lawyers, women's and children's health groups, activists and media take up cases with clear conflict of interest and brings them to the notice of the parties involved, the government and media. AACI aims at having a legal protection from conflicts of interests in all sectors in public policy.

We are deeply concerned about International Life Sciences Institute (ILSI) sponsoring a survey on consumption of sugars being conducted by ICMR-NIN. We have come to know about this well -publicized study about sugar consumption in few metro cities through the media.

<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/home/science/women-in-metro-cities-consume-higher-quantities-of-added-sugar-than-men-survey/articleshow/73121446.cms>

ILSI, as you may be aware, is a lobbying arm of the food industry. We would like to share how ILSI has been famously pursuing policy influence in India and elsewhere, in particular, with respect to sugary foods and beverages. Here are some examples where ILSI has been reported to be involved:

1. New York Times A Shadowy Industry Group Shapes Food Policy Around the World (September 2019).

"When the Indian government bowed to powerful food companies last year and postponed its decision to put red warning labels on unhealthy packaged food, officials also sought to placate critics of the delay by creating an expert panel to review the proposed labeling system, which would have gone far beyond what other countries have done in the battle to combat soaring obesity rates."

2. Look at who the Niti Aayog is consulting (October 2017)

<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/blogs/staying-alive/look-at-who-the-niti-aayog-is-consulting/>

3. Is Coca-Cola Influencing India's Public Health Policies? (February 2019)

Two members of FSSAI, which sets food safety standards in India, are also affiliated with an organisation funded by Coca-Cola and which is known to have manipulated consumers in China.

<https://thewire.in/health/coca-cola-junk-food-companies-are-influencing-indias-public-health-policies>

4. Making China safe for Coke: how Coca-Cola shaped obesity science and policy in China

BMJ 2019; 364 doi: <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.k5050> (Published 09 January 2019)

Cite this as: BMJ 2019;364:k5050

<https://www.bmj.com/content/364/bmj.k5050>

<https://www.theguardian.com/business/2019/jan/10/coca-cola-influence-china-obesity-policy-protect-sales-bmj-report>

These stories in the BMJ, international and national media provide clear information based on which we record our concerns.

We wonder what strategic direction ICMR-NIN the premier research agency of India is giving to the people of India when this survey findings are projected in the media may potentially perpetuate more sugar consumption while pretending to be concerned about non-communicable diseases. (January 2020)

<https://www.thehansindia.com/hans/young-hans/indian-school-kids-consuming-lesser-sugar-than-adults-survey-595475>

We would like ICMR to respond to the following questions in public health interest, the mandate of MOHFW, GOI.

1. What are the conclusions of the study according to you?
2. How did you manage conflicts of interest in having this sponsored by ILSI?
3. What are your plans to use this study for policy development in India or its States?
4. Why are the study reports being presented as though Indians are eating "less than recommended" sugar, do these kind of messages not conflict with your 'concern' for Non Communicable Diseases?

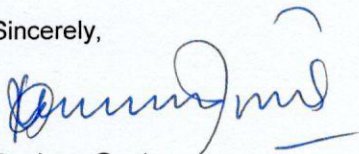
AACI is seriously concerned about the increasing non-communicable disease burden in the country and believes that the Government of India must follow the principles that have been captured in a recent Lancet analysis on double burden of malnutrition. This includes a reference to "...incompatible partnerships" and further..."...private-sector representatives should not be assumed and policy development processes need to be firewalled from vested interests".

[https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(19\)32690-X/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(19)32690-X/fulltext)

We believe this ICMR-NIN and ILSI is an 'incompatible partnership'. We urge you to re-examine your policies to avoid such partnerships; and incorporate clauses to prevent and manage conflict of interest.

We look forward to your response, and information on the action initiated in this case based on the issues raised here. Please acknowledge the receipt of this letter.

Sincerely,



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Convener Alliance Against Conflict of Interest (AACI)
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Copy to:

1. Dr. Hemalatha R, Director, ICMR-National Institute of Nutrition
2. Smt Preeti Sudan, Secretary, MOHFW, Government of India
3. Sh. PK Sinha, Principal Advisor to PM

navigation and thermal controls, orbital mechanics and Earth observation, etc. that make up the key aspects of the mission

intervention and during emergencies. The space flyers will also be trained in basic biology, physics and medicine, etc.

Gaganyaan will prepare specific modules with the help of several experts

MEN LIKE SWEET, WOMEN LOVE SWEETER

Most of us know that consuming excess sugar may have a health impact. But for most of us, that is hardly an argument convincing enough to make us shun sweets. While fruits, vegetables and dairy products are among foods that naturally contain sugar, we also end up consuming added sugar in the form of desserts, sweet beverages and suchlike.

An ICMR-National Institute of Nutrition (NIN), Hyderabad, survey, which was sponsored by International Life Sciences Institute-India (ILSI-India), measured added sugar intake levels in seven major metro cities. Here's what it found

Sugar use much lower than the recommended level

30grams
Per day intake of added sugar as recommended by ICMR

20.2g WOMEN

18.7g MEN

19.5g
Avg across metros



Mumbai has a sweet tooth

26.3g | Average daily sugar consumption for a Mumbaikar. The highest level for the metros surveyed



What is added sugar?

The sugars and syrups added to foods during processing. Desserts, sodas and energy and sports drinks are among foods/beverages that contain added sugars

WHO guidelines issued in 2015 called for adults and children to reduce daily intake of free sugars to less than 10% of total energy intake. It added that a further reduction to below 5% or roughly 25 gm (6 teaspoons) per day would provide additional health benefits. That would suggest most Indian metros are keeping their added sugar use in check

Energy through added sugar

6.6% | Mumbai also leads in share of total energy coming from added sugar

5.1% Avg of all the states

Kolkata **3.5%**

Delhi **6.1%**

Ahmedabad **5.9%**

Hyderabad **5.4%**

Bengaluru **4.1%**

Chennai **3.9%**

Not kids, adults consume most added sugar



17.6g The daily added sugar consumption for schoolchildren. It was more than the daily 15.6g consumed by pre-school children

Source: ICMR-NIN, maysr.icmr.org. While the survey suggests Indians are consuming less sugar than recommended levels, intake patterns may not be the same for all income cats