



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

1998 RECIPIENT OF THE RIGHT LIVELIHOOD AWARD

PRESS RELEASE

GAIN – industry’s Trojan Horse to enter WHO’s policy setting process?

22nd January 2013

While the WHO Reform Process proceeds this week at WHO’s 132nd Executive Board meeting in Geneva, IBFAN, the global network that works to protect infant health by strengthening independent, transparent and effective controls on the baby food industry, has issued a stark warning. Today, in a closed meeting, the **Standing Committee on NGOs** (consisting of 5 countries: **Armenia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Seychelles** and **Ecuador**) will consider an application for NGO official relations status with WHO from **GAIN (the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition)**. GAIN is a new type public private entity which works to open up markets for its 600 partner companies (including **Danone**, the world’s second largest baby food company, **Mars, Pepsi**, and **Coca Cola**).

IBFAN is concerned and has evidence that GAIN is actively undermining governments' attempts to implement WHA Resolutions on infant and young child feeding. It is illogical for Member States to allow such a controversial accreditation to go through while they are demanding, in the Reform Process process, more clarity on WHO’s conflicts of interest procedures. Moreover, this application comes just as WHO is working on the guidelines for the marketing of complementary foods – a key policy issue that GAIN is keen to influence.

WHO Member States need to ensure that WHO is working impartially in the interests of public health and that the NGOs WHO collaborates with are committed to working to that end.

For more information and specific examples about how GAIN undermines existing WHA Resolutions please see the Note 1.

IBFAN has been contributing to the debate about WHO’s Reform Process, particularly the issue of Conflicts of Interest. In this context IBFAN welcomes the proposals for a policy on engagement with NGOs and has several recommendations for its improvement, which will be offered to Member States tomorrow:

1. While transparency and public disclosure of WHO’s interaction with NGOs and the Private Sector is both necessary and critical, it is insufficient.
2. WHO must develop a comprehensive policy on conflicts of interest with criteria that distinguishes between bodies with a commercial interest in WHO policies and those who do not.
3. Attempting to address this issue on a case-by-case basis will be subjective, insufficient and may involve substantial administrative costs. WHO and MS must establish objective criteria defining cut off points regarding acceptable levels of commercial involvement, partnership and funding.
4. There are now many 'hybrid' NGOs that are partnerships with business or front organisations for them. These bodies - (which IBFAN calls BINGOs - Business Interest NGOs) often have multiple purposes. Alongside the public health objective they usually assist commercial companies in the creation of markets for their products. So the criteria must not only look at direct commercial financing but also 'mission' and the composition of decision-making structures. Once set, these bench marks can be used to frame WHO’s collaboration, consultation and accreditation process.
5. Such a differentiation would not preclude WHO from hearing the views of the private sector, but would ensure that all its relations and interactions with external bodies would be coherently and

transparently guided by a clear policy understandable to all. We believe that this would be one important way to safeguard WHO's norms and standard setting processes.

Note 1

In October IBFAN learned that GAIN had been challenging the Kenya government about its proposed new law on the marketing of baby foods. In its lobby paper GAIN implied that proceeding with the law would threaten "Kenya's ability to meet its commitments as a Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) country." Thankfully Kenya went ahead with the Law. At the Codex Alimentarius meetings GAIN consistently lobbies for companies to be allowed to use promotional claims – knowing that this would prevent Member States from banning such tactics. In December GAIN's lack of transparency was demonstrated in an exchange in the British Medical Journal, which challenged the groundbreaking baby food law in India that has been so critical in the protection of breastfeeding and child health. (<http://info.babymilkaction.org/132ndEB2013>)

For more information:

Patti Rundall, Co-Chair, IBFAN/Baby Milk Action prundall@babymilkaction.org +44 7786 523493

Ina Verzivolli, Human Rights Officer, IBFAN/GIFA ina.verzivolli@gifa.org

Lida Lhotska, IBFAN Regional Coordinator, IBFAN/GIFA lida.lhotska@gifa.org

IBFAN is a 33-year old coalition of more than 273 not-for-profit non-governmental organizations in 168 developing and industrialized nations. The network works for better child health and nutrition through the protection, promotion and support of breastfeeding and the elimination of irresponsible marketing of breastmilk substitutes. www.ibfan.org