

A Workshop
on
Tools for Prevention and Management of Conflicts of Interest in the
Health and Nutrition Sector in India

Organised by
Breastfeeding Promotion Network of India(BPNI) in partnership with Swadeshi
Jagran Manch (SJM)

Supported by
Nutrition Advocacy in Public Interest(NAP)
Alliance Against Conflict of Interest (AACI)

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Venue
Seminar Hall No. 2, India International Centre , New Delhi

Background

Conflict of interest has become an important consideration in governance today. The current government did recognize the need to prevent conflict of interest when it found a prominent place in the Prime Minister's publicized 17 point agenda in July, 2014.

Conflicts of Interest as a concept is broadly defined as a set of circumstances that creates a risk that professional judgement or actions regarding a primary interest will be unduly influenced by a secondary interest.

Conflicts of Interest can be institutional or personal and with the growing abundance of Public Private Partnerships (PPPs) in the public policy sector especially health and nutrition policies mostly involve complex relationships among the government actors and commercial partners. This can have a negative impact on public health and there is a growing consensus among the experts, civil society, media and national think tanks that preventing and managing conflict of interest (COI) is critical to curb corruption and it requires urgent attention.

There are several global instruments to identify and analyse Conflict of Interest in a situation, **Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)** provides one of those guidelines for development of such tools. The **OECD** helps countries modernise their approach for managing conflict of interest by mapping "at risk" areas and positions within the public service. In the year 2004, the Government of India also signed and fully ratified the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) of 2003. There are detailed guidelines for the Member States on conflicts of interest and the measures that can be taken to protect the relevant public health policies, as per Article 5.3 of the FCTC, with respect to tobacco control from commercial and other vested interests of the tobacco industry. Though Sh. Narendra Modi in April 2015 asked his MPs with conflict of interests to stay away from Parliamentary committees. The issue emerged after member of a committee constituted to look into pictorial warnings on tobacco products made controversial remark suiting to his interest.

The Rajya Sabha's Department-Related Standing Committee on Personnel, Public Grievances, Law and Justice, Government of India in its 69th Report, recommended that conflict of interest be included under bribery (15 A).

As ray of hope came in 2015 when a private Bill titled 'The Prevention and Management of Conflict of Interest Bill' was tabled in the Parliament by E. M. Sudarsana Natchiappan a former MP from Indian National Congress party. Unfortunately it never saw the light of the day. Interestingly, in December 2017 in an opinion piece given to The Hindu Feroze Varun Gandhi, a BJP MP urged the Nation to bring a policy reform to have a mandatory conflict of interest framework. He emphasized that this will be crucial in preventing cases of corruption.

The latest hope is the National Nutrition Strategy of India launched by the Niti Aayog in 2017. It acknowledges the importance of curbing conflict of interest and cites in its guiding principle 5.10 to ensure that there is no conflict of interest.

“An underlying principle of action is that policy development and programme implementation must be transparent, open to public scrutiny and kept free from conflict of interest, with requisite safeguards.(This includes ensuring that representation on policy, technical advisory groups and various management committees at different levels is free from conflict of interest.)”

This is a path breaking intervention. But, unfortunately reports from several governments departments reveal that there is no operational guideline for its implementation, the status is the same as 5 years back based on information gathered from several ministries/departments. Lack of clear guidance and mechanisms to prevent and manage Conflict of Interest is clearly a problem that needs solutions.

Inspired by guiding principle of the National Nutrition Strategy to ensure there is no conflicts of interest in policy development and programme planning, the Breastfeeding Promotion Network of India (BPNI) is organising this workshop in partnership with Swadeshi Jagran Manch that addresses this gap in a practical way to assist Niti Aayog Government of India, to implement its vision, with a current focus on health and nutrition sector. Alliance Against Conflict of Interest(AACI) , and Nutrition Advocacy in Public Interest (NAPi) the national think tanks on the issues are supporting allainces. The workshop is being organised with following aims and objectives.

Aim

The aim of the workshop is to galvanize action to prevent and manage Conflict of Interest in the health and nutrition sector.

Objectives

- a) To assist Niti Aayog in achieving their vision of ensuring no conflict of interest in as per the National Nutrition Strategy Guiding Principles.
- b) To understand the definition and concept of conflicts of interest and share examples of conflict of interest.
- c) To learn, how to identify and manage situation of conflicts of interest in policy and programme.
- d) To provide inputs for formulation of an operational guideline for the health and nutrition sector for prevention and management of conflicts of interest.

Expected Outputs

- Final draft of tools to identify and manage
- Final draft of a guidelines for prevention and managemnet of COI.
- Both the tools shared with NITI Aayog to move forward on this issue.

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