C3 | CONFRONTING THE COMMERCIAL DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH

Introduction

Industry-propelled health harms continue to persist. Past editions of *Global Health Watch* explored issues related to extractive industries, global food industries, and the growth and power of transnational corporations generally. Most attention went to what we now call unhealthy commodities: tobacco/tobacco-related products, ultra-processed/obesogenic foods, and alcohol. Many of the earlier concerns remain, largely in corporate push-back against progressive initiatives to limit the promotion and consumption of unhealthy commodities.

The particular focus in this chapter will be on both the novel and well-worn strategies companies use to shape the consumer environment and the conditions that shape government regulatory approaches. This chapter also identifies assumptions that steer governments away from regulatory measures, making it harder for public health policy actors to counter economic arguments that support continued growth in such industries. This is the case for many low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) where the drive for short-term economic growth and "development" can override longer-term health considerations.

What are commercial determinants of health and why do they matter?

Transnational tobacco, food, and alcohol companies continue to produce and promote unhealthy products, shaping the policy landscape, public discourse, and consumer space. The outcome is what the World Health Organization (WHO) has called a "slow-motion disaster" for non-communicable diseases (NCDs). The commercial determinants of health (CDoH), as they are now called, have been defined as "strategies and approaches used by the private sector to promote products and choices that are detrimental to health" (Kickbusch, Allen, and Franz 2016). The CDoH lens is a direct response to the industry-manipulated framing of consumption-based NCDs as rooted in individual choice, shifting responsibility away from unhealthy product producing industries.

The tobacco industry is notoriously skilled at shifting responsibility to consumers, veiling its own devious practices and products. The appeal to individual responsibility continues to resonate with ideologies that hold personal freedom as sacrosanct. The deception lies in the assumption that all conditions are held equal for all individuals. Clearly not all individuals have access to necessary information about options or the monetary capacity to purchase the healthiest option, particularly with respect to food.

There is now widespread recognition of how these companies shape the consumer environment, making unhealthy products normalized, attractive, pervasive, and affordable. It is not simply products floating in an environment that shapes consumption, but intentional corporate actions to manipulate consumers, to produce products that induce addiction, and to influence policies in their favor, ultimately creating "toxic" consumer environments.

Where industries accede to some form of control, it tends to be self-regulation whereby they position themselves as "part of the solution." Companies often welcome self-regulation as a strategy to ward off statutory regulations. When government regulation is imposed, companies have also been relentless in using litigation. These companies have mobilized extensive resources to pursue protracted legal battles in national and sub-national courts, and in international trade and investment dispute forums. This context is also conditioned by neoliberal principles, including an overarching assumption that the freer the market, the better for everyone. This assumption has shaped the relationship between governments, markets, and individuals in ways that make it difficult to advocate for stronger regulatory measures governing production and consumption of unhealthy commodities (Lencucha and Thow 2020).

Issues are also converging in dramatic ways, making the CDoH more pressing (Mialon 2020). There is growing attention on the synergy of three pandemics, namely obesity, undernutrition, and climate change. They constitute a syndemic, or synergy of epidemics, because they co-occur in time and place and interact with each other to produce complex sequelae. These pandemics share common underlying food-related societal drivers including the activities of the transglobal food industry which distort food environments and contribute to environmental degradation. Packaging materials used by the food, alcohol, and tobacco industries have a negative impact on the environment. The very process of manufacturing packaging materials contributes to climate change through depletion of natural resources and greenhouse gas emissions. For example, in Europe, only 30% of the 25 million tonnes of plastic waste generated is recycled, with 39% being incinerated and 31% dumped in landfills (Calleja 2019). Companies often also create conditions of economic precarity, such as opposing policies that seek to instate livable wages for workers (Maani et al. 2021). While unhealthy commodity industries attempt to detach themselves from such negative consequences, the syndemic approach widens the lens on health problems and puts them in the context of other diseases and the social and economic inequities that fuel them (Swinburn et al. 2019).

The remainder of this chapter outlines the CDoH, including recent approaches by companies to solidify their market presence, and actions by governments and other groups to stave off this influence.

The health burden of unhealthy commodities

1. Tobacco

Tobacco products are consumed by 1.3 billion people globally. Eight million people die annually due to tobacco, and over 90% of these deaths are due to direct use (smoking) of tobacco products. Eighty percent of current tobacco users are in LMICs (WHO 2020). The emerging markets in LMICs have been the target of transnational tobacco companies as these firms look to expand their reach and to compensate for shrinking markets in high-income countries (HICs). In addition to harms caused by tobacco use, its production also places a social and economic burden on communities and has been linked to numerous environmental harms. Tobacco growing uses child labor and companies have exploitative arrangements with growers. Household debt is also common for smallholder tobacco farmers (Magati et al. 2019).

2. Alcohol

Of the 3 million deaths from alcohol and alcohol-related incidents globally, 13.5% occur among young people aged 20–39 years (WHO 2018). This age group is a common target of alcohol marketing campaigns which encourage early alcohol initiation and harmful alcohol use, such as binge drinking. The surge in production and popularity of flavored alcoholic beverages (FABs) is also alcohol industry's tactic to capture the young demographic. As with tobacco, alcohol marketing and consumption is increasingly pivoting to LMIC markets.

Image C3.1 A young boy harvests tobacco on a farm near Sampang, East Java, Indonesia. *Source:* Human Rights Watch, "A boy harvests tobacco on a farm near Sampang, East Java," in "Child labour in tobacco growing, Indonesia." Unfairtobacco. n.d. Accessed May 25, 2021. https://www.unfairtobacco.org/en/child-labour-in-tobacco-growing/child-labour-in-tobacco-growing-indonesia/#/. Licensed under CC BY-NC-ND 3.0 US.

3. Unhealthy food

Poor quality of food consumed is linked to health challenges such as micronutrient deficiency, stunting, obesity, and other chronic conditions. While the amount of food available has increased over the decades, many diets are becoming less healthy. Consumption of fruit, vegetables, whole grains, nuts, and seeds, the key components of a nutritious diet, remains below the required daily intake level across all world regions. Recent dietary changes are most evident in the "majority world" (i.e., LMICs), where the volume of soft drink consumption increased by an average annual growth rate of 5.2% per person between 1997 and 2009 (Moodie et al. 2013). Consumption of sugary snacks and drinks is also increasing among very young children (6–23 months of age) in LMICs (Huffman et al. 2014)

Industry strategies to promote unhealthy commodities

These health challenges stem from deliberate efforts by companies to influence consumption patterns and curtail regulation. We focus on the three main strategies of marketing, lobbying, and corporate social responsibility.

1. Marketing

Companies consistently target new markets with existing or new products and take advantage of weak regulations and vulnerable social conditions to do so. With the increase in advertising bans and saturation of markets in many HICs, unhealthy commodity companies have found novel ways to promote their products. One of the most subtle and pervasive is the infiltration of social media. Tobacco companies have been found to sponsor parties hosted by social media influencers replete with their products and resulting in the widespread diffusion of their product images on social media (Kozinets 2019).

While advertising bans force tobacco companies to use these discrete practices, the alcohol and food industry have a less restricted marketing path. Alcohol companies indiscriminately advertise during global sporting events like the FIFA World Cup, viewed by billions around the globe. Alcohol and food industry also use social media marketing initiatives including use of celebrities in advertisements, planting their products firmly in popular culture. McDonald's, Coca-Cola, PepsiCo and a host of alcohol companies have been quick to exploit the popularity of reality TV shows by promoting their brands on recent editions of Big Brother Brazil and Nigeria, which are viewed by millions of youths. Alcohol brands are also promoted through interactive games, competitions, and user-generated content and peer endorsements on social media platforms (Atkinson et al. 2017). The ubiquitous uptake and use of smartphones has extended marketing reach beyond traditional broadcast media, with promotion through social media platforms slipping through most regulatory frameworks. The overall UK expenditure on digital advertising is twice that of traditional advertising (£10.3 billion vs £5.2 billion) (Orsini 2018). Although this example is not specific to unhealthy commodities, this pattern is reflected in these industries as well.

2. Lobbying

Manufacturers of unhealthy commodities use different lobbying tactics to avoid strict regulation and receive favorable treatment by governments. The direct contact with government is often legitimized by companies' purported contribution to economic growth. Tobacco remains an entrenched cash crop in some LMICs in Asia, Africa, and South America, and the industry has direct access to economic sectors of government which support tobacco as a means of economic development. Companies use this contact to shape policy and perception. Alcohol companies similarly lobby to protect their economic interests. In one instance, strong direct lobbying by the alcohol industry led the Brazilian Congress in 1996 to define alcoholic beverages for advertising purposes as those with an alcohol concentration greater than 13%, effectively eliminating advertising controls for beer and most wines (Noel et al. 2017).

Increasing public health initiatives to intervene in the obesity pandemic has intensified lobbying to resist food regulations. Focal issues have been around excise taxation measures for sugar-sweetened (soda) beverages, which is proving effective in reducing consumption (Hofman 2021), menu labeling, "front-of-pack nutrition labeling" (FOPNL), and placing limits on fast food portion sizes. The food industry has resisted such measures, using domestic courts, threats of trade or investment disputes, and extensive lobbying. Between 2009 and 2015 the main producers of sugar-sweetened beverages in the US spent $100 million to fight the introduction of tax or other regulatory measures (O'Hara and Musicus 2015). The food industry also spends massive amounts attempting to shape influential dietary guidelines. Mars Incorporated alone spent $2 million in 2018–2019 lobbying US Congress, and soda makers like Coca-Cola and PepsiCo spent $24 million in 2014–2015 to resist the move by government to encourage less soda consumption (Stillerman 2019).

Image C3.2 A health food label from a Chilean product specifying that the product is "high in sugar … high in saturated fats … high in sodium … and high in calories."
Source: Ministry of Health, Government of Chile.

Box C3.1: Front-of-pack nutrition labeling (FOPNL)

Institutional structures can also influence dynamics regarding industry lobbying. The use of food labels to inform consumers and support healthier diets – including "interpretive" front-of-pack labels using symbols, colors, or words – are recommended by the WHO. Countries have adopted diverse approaches to front-of-pack labeling, informed by national context. However, the use of such labels has been contested at the World Trade Organization (WTO) as a potentially "unnecessary" barrier to trade.

The Codex Alimentarius Commission (Codex), a multilateral United Nations body responsible for work on food standards, is now developing global guidance for FOPNL. As Codex is recognized by the WTO as an international standards setting body, guidance it develops also has potential to act as a reference point for trade discussions as well as for national policy making.

However, Codex has a dual mandate: to protect consumer health and to ensure fair trade practices. Industry Observers at Codex have been quick to provide their input for Codex work on front-of-pack labeling through participating in working groups and Codex meetings and lobbying Ministries of Agriculture and Industry, which often represent countries at Codex. In contrast, public health actors to date have been under-represented in these Codex discussions. There is an urgent need for balanced representation at Codex to ensure that the definition of "front-of-pack nutrition labeling" supports schemes most likely to be effective in achieving public health objectives and not, for example, industry preferred options such as the Guideline Daily Amount that aren't backed by evidence.

3. Corporate social responsibility

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives are actions taken by industry (voluntarily or as part of industry-wide obligations) ostensibly to contribute to social well-being, but essentially aimed at portraying themselves in good light and to leverage favorable (i.e., prevent unfavorable) government regulation. In Malawi, British American Tobacco (BAT) as part of its CSR agenda committed $2.3 million to the Eliminating Child Labour in Tobacco Growing Foundation (ECLT). This foundation has built schools, planted trees, and constructed shallow wells to address the use of child labor in tobacco farming. However, critics note that the amount committed to the Foundation does not compare to the profits made from engaging children in tobacco farming. Recent analysis of the CSR activities of Djarum, a tobacco company in Indonesia, illustrates how CSR activities are used to influence public perception and gain favor with the government (Siahaya and Smits 2020). Box C3.2 showcases the work of The

Box C3.2: The Foundation for a Smoke-Free World

The Foundation for a Smoke-Free World was created with a purported mission to end smoking in this generation. The foundation is funded by Philip Morris International and, although it places emphasis on eliminating cigarette consumption, Philip Morris has not waned in its promotion of cigarettes worldwide, still selling over 700 billion cigarettes per year. At the same time its heated tobacco product sales have skyrocketed. The Foundation has used this framing to position itself as a partner in public health and champion of "harm reduction"(Yach, 2021).

The Foundation has channeled resources into tobacco growing countries building strong relationships with government. For example, the Foundation is working in Malawi, providing lucrative scholarships to young researchers to pursue graduate studies around the world. It has also established a Tobacco Transformation Index,™ where it evalutes 15 of the largest tobacco companies in the world on indicators such as harm reduction. The Foundation also produces the Global Trends in Nicotine report to identify the major players in nicotine delivery, outline each of their product organization and geographic focus, and quantify their outputs.

The Foundation's activity reflects a growing emphasis on redirecting public perception and reframing tobacco company activities under the guise of harm reduction while pursuing new addictive products.

Foundation for a Smoke-Free World which is funded by Philip Morris International (PMI), and which continues to obscure PMI's consistent orientation towards cigarette sales (Yach 2021).

The alcohol industry's CSR activities have similarly been shown to be vehicles used to influence policy decisions, delay and offset alcohol control legislation, and indirectly market their brands. The industry's "responsible drinking" campaigns use ambiguous language to define harmful drinking practices and often frame the problem as arising from behavioral factors (Petticrew et al. 2016), only scarcely mentioning the harmful effects of alcohol.

Food industries use CSR initiatives to build a positive public image and promote their products. Through the Project Last Mile, a public–private partnership (PPP) among the Coca-Cola Company, US Agency for International Development (USAID), the Global Fund, and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Coca-Cola branded vehicles are used to deliver medical supplies to remote villages notably in Africa, along with their unhealthy product. Multinational companies like PepsiCo often sponsor education programs that promote healthy lifestyles usually targeting youth, which ultimately serve as a marketing strategy.

PepsiCo explicitly linked their CSR initiative to product sales by successfully incentivizing purchase of specially marked PepsiCo beverages with participation in its Refresh project (Dorfman et al. 2012). Pepsi's Refresh project, which ran from 2010 to 2012, was a $20 million initiative which sought to support social impact projects nominated and selected by their consumers (including businesses, non-profit organizations, and individuals) around the world.

Unhealthy commodity industry activities during the COVID-19 pandemic

As part of the preventive measures during the COVID-19 pandemic, countries instituted lockdowns which saw businesses, including bars and restaurants, shut down for several weeks to curb the spread of the virus. These lockdowns and restrictions on socialization negatively affected food and alcohol industries that rely on on-site consumption. In response, many of these companies shifted to "pandemic-tailored" digital marketing campaigns. These campaigns helped companies to build and maintain brand loyalty by inserting themselves into the COVID-19 response through novel advertising and empathetic messages and hashtags. McDonald's, for example, encouraged consumers to stay at home and instead used delivery services for consumers to continue accessing their products. In Mexico, Burger King modified their "#HaveItYourWay" hashtag to "#HaveItYourWayAtHome" to align with the pandemic prevention guidelines (White, Nieto, and Barquera 2020). Numerous examples exist where tobacco companies like BAT provided branded masks to social influencers to use on social media postings, or where BAT and PMI used a "stay at home" hashtag promoted by government to promote electronic cigarette devices in numerous countries in the world (Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids 2021).

The pandemic has also provided an opportunity for food and beverage industry to expand the reach of their CSR activities by fostering partnerships with governments and international agencies. PepsiCo reportedly spent $49 million in support to international organizations like Save the Children, Red Cross, and local non-profits for food relief and health system strengthening efforts in over 40 countries (PepsiCo 2020). Heineken donated €15 million to support relief efforts of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. The WHO's COVID-19 Solidarity Response Fund received support from Coca-Cola and PepsiCo through Global Citizens, a non-governmental organization (NGO) that is working to end extreme poverty by 2030. Although the details are not known in each of these cases, corporate donations generally trigger tax savings; critics, in turn, argue that such CSR activities essentially exploit the COVID-19 pandemic for cheap marketing and profit maximization (White et al. 2020). More generally, post-pandemic rebuilding of economies needs to be safeguarded from the threat of "COVID capture," where unhealthy commodity industries attempt to influence public health policy responses that may interfere with their vested interests (Collin 2020).

Conditions that facilitate unhealthy commodity industry influence on consumers and governments

There are important conditions that allow industries to exert their policy and political influence. Market regulation is an uphill battle within a free-market paradigm, and the "commonsense" of de- and anti-regulation underpins the global system of economic policy. This laissez-faire orientation puts the onus on consumers rather than on governments to shape market practices, even when company products may cause harm.

1. Trade and investment regimes

The market penetration in LMICs of transnational companies producing unhealthy commodities has been facilitated by liberalized trade and foreign direct investment (FDI) regimes (Lencucha and Thow 2019). As one example, the 1994 North American Free Trade Agreement (between the USA, Canada, and Mexico) increased US sugar-sweetened beverages exports and FDI, contributing to Mexico having the highest consumption of soft drinks globally. Trade agreement rules also constrict the range of public health measures governments can take, while creating new openings for industry to influence regulatory policy (Labonté 2019b). Tobacco "exceptionalism" and the recent decade of tobacco-related trade and investment disputes, however, have reinforced flexibilities within these regimes that allow for government regulation over tobacco products (Zhou and Liberman 2020). Whether such interpretations will extend to trade or investment disputes regarding food and alcohol products remains to be seen (see Chapter D2).

As part of their economic development or growth strategies, governments often provide incentives for investors to promote the inflow of FDI including fiscal incentives and investor protections via international investment agreements. Such incentives often increase supply and consumption of unhealthy commodities in LMICs. Vietnam, for example, removed restrictions on FDI as a requirement for entry into the WTO. This resulted in greater investment by transnational food companies and enabled significant growth in sales of sugar-sweetened carbonated beverages from 6.7% to 23% of total beverage sales per year (Schram et al. 2015). Similarly, a comparison between Peru and Bolivia showed a 122% increase in soft drink production following Peru's ratification of the US/Peru Free Trade Agreement, compared to minimal change in Bolivia which had no trade agreement with the US (Baker et al. 2016). In Zambia, the government offered tax incentives and infrastructure support to two cigarette plants aimed, in part, at increasing consumption within the country, despite being a signatory to the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO FCTC) which explicitly prohibits incentives to the tobacco industry (Labonté et al. 2019).

2. Regulatory environments

Regulatory environments are shaped not only by powerful companies, but by pervasive and entrenched ideas of government-market relationships. Ideas like "the market will decide" underpin government reluctance to directly regulate harmful consumer products. These ideas also rationalize challenges waged against government regulation by industry interests. Recent examples include BAT contesting the introduction of stricter tobacco control measures in Uganda and Kenya and the now famous PMI case against standardized cigarette packaging in Australia. Tobacco companies have also convinced governments to pursue legal challenges to regulations through the WTO, as witnessed in response to Australia's standardized packaging legislation. Fortunately, these cases have resulted in decisions in favor of government regulation, but with significant monetary costs to governments for the often-lengthy process of litigation. Given the cost of the process, these cases often result in regulatory chill in which governments (both the challenged government and other countries observing the industry arguments and actions) may delay or even abandon adoption of the regulation (Kelsey 2017).

Policies seeking to reduce consumption of unhealthy foods have also faced trade-related challenges. Mandatory interpretive nutrition labeling, such as a proposed requirement by the Government of Thailand for a front-of-pack label stating "children should take less," has been challenged repeatedly at the WTO's Technical Barriers to Trade Committee (Thow et al. 2017). In Samoa, a ban on the importation of turkey tails (a highly fatty and nutritionally poor cut of meat) in order to address obesity in the country was removed as part of the country's requirements to join the WTO.

The alcohol industry has been successful in influencing policy change to reduce regulation in a number of LMICs. In several African countries (Lesotho, Malawi, Uganda, and Botswana), the alcohol industry influenced national alcohol control policy to focus on individual behavior change rather than industry regulation. South Africa's 2016 Liquor Amendment Bill proposed a ban on all alcohol advertising, which was strongly opposed by industry and is yet to be enacted. In Botswana, however, the main producers of alcohol unsuccessfully

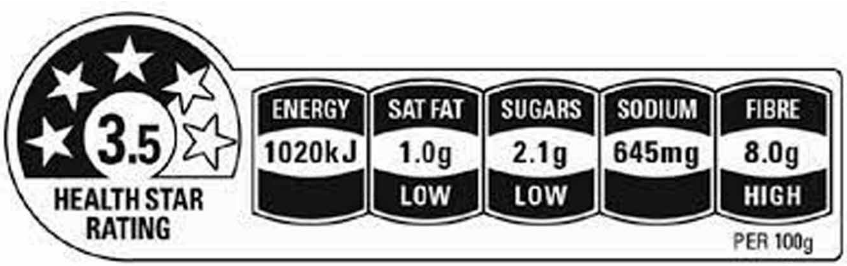

Image C3.3 Health Star Rating (Australia–New Zealand).

Source: Reproduced with permission from the Commonwealth of Australia; World Health Organization, "Manual to Develop and Implement Frontofpack Nutrition Labeling: Guidance for Countries on the Selection and Testing of Evidence-Informed Front-of-Pack Nutrition Labeling Systems in the WHO European Region." Copenhagen: WHO Regional Office for Europe, 2020. https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/336988/WHO-EURO-2020-1569-41320-56234-eng.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

contested the introduction of a 30% levy on all alcoholic beverages, which has been implemented.

Addressing the commercial determinants of health

Despite the uphill struggles that health activists face in attempting to control the spread of unhealthy commodities by confronting their industry purveyors, there have been cases of "success" in implementing measures to create health-promoting environments and to reduce commercial influence in policy making.

1. Promoting healthy environments

Fiscal policies that create price-based incentives are effective in reducing consumption of health-harming products. Following reforms of the excise tax structure in Thailand in 2017, the alcohol tax rate became proportionate to alcohol content while tobacco taxes increased from 20% to 40% (Phonsuk and Suphanchaimat 2019), which reduced consumption of these products. The Power of the Consumer in Mexico, ACT Health Promotion in Brazil, and Healthy Living Alliance in South Africa are activist civil society organizations (CSOs) that have helped garner public support for a sugar tax passed by their governments. Box C3.3 shows the advocacy activities of ACT Health Promotion of Brazil for promoting healthy environments.

Food reformulation efforts to reduce the number of unhealthy components such as sugar, salt, and trans fats have been marked by controversy. Reformulation efforts tend to be voluntary and self-regulated, making their effectiveness questionable. Examples of reformulation include the salt reduction pledge of the UK Responsibility Bill to reduce salt content in foods. Regulation at the sub-national level has also encouraged reformulation. For example, the City of New York's administration successfully instituted a ban on trans-unsaturated fatty acids and calorie labeling at point of sale (Kelly et al. 2016). While regulation remains a critical focus, it is also essential for activists to encourage governments to support healthy product producing companies (Lencucha et al. 2018). The incentives, subsidies, and other infrastructure supports to health-harming companies that currently exist in many (or even most) countries are unacceptable and unjustifiable from an economic perspective when the economic and social costs to society far exceed any returns received by government.

Box C3.3: ACT Health Promotion advocacy work in Brazil

ACT Health Promotion (http://actbr.org.br/) in Brazil was originally a tobacco control advocacy organization. It has expanded its mission since 2014 and began to work on the prevention of other chronic non-communicable disease risk factors which, in addition to smoking control, include the promotion of healthy eating, control of alcohol abuse, and physical activity. ACT systematically monitors industry activity including tobacco, food and beverage, and alcohol companies. The organization uses this monitoring activity in their advocacy and activism efforts. For example, ACT recently exposed and publicly scrutinized a new partnership between Coca-Cola and the Ministry of Health in Brazil. They also organized a "happiness tent" inside Congress to mobilize support for a bill that prohibited soft drinks in schools; the bill passed. Another recent investigative initiative exposed government subsidies to the soda industry. The investigative work resulted in national press coverage and is mobilizing support to end these subsidies.

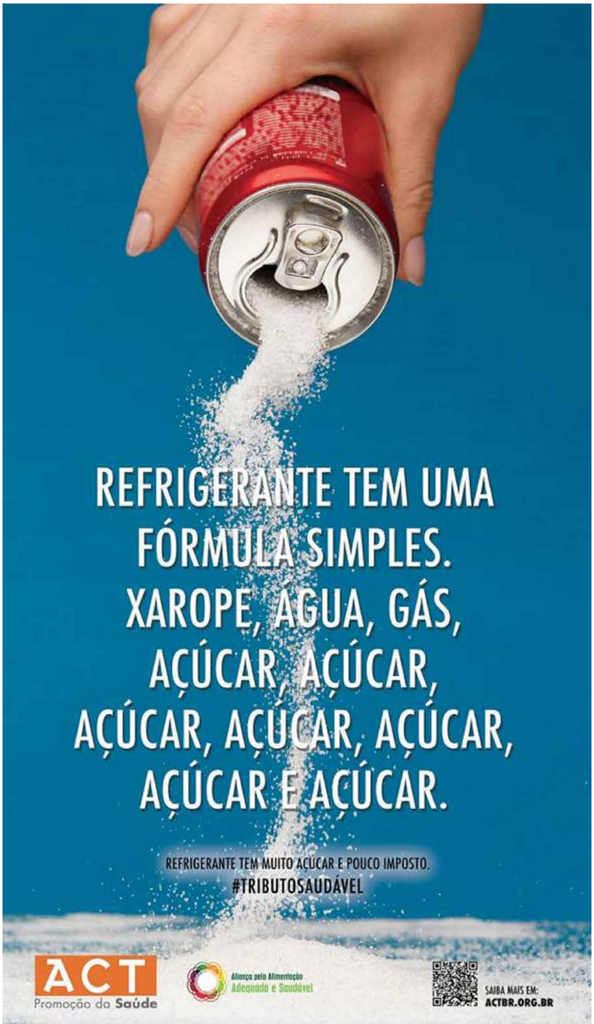

Image C3.4 A health promotion ad from Brazil that reads: "Soda has a simple formula. Syrup, water, gas, sugar, sugar, sugar, sugar, sugar, sugar and sugar."
Source: Campanhas Destaque Campanha, "Bebida açucarada. Se faz mal para a saúde, tem que ter mais imposto," Aliança Pela Alimentação Adequada e Saudável (blog). October 20, 2020. https://alimentacaosaudavel.org.br/tributo-saudavel/

2. Managing conflict of interest

Public health advocates insist that industries' inherent profit-making mandate means they should not have any role in design and implementation of regulations affecting their products. But they do, through various consultative and PPP arrangements. The continued growth in such partnerships makes it critically important that there are clear rules to manage the influence of private partners and to minimize any conflicts of interest.

One necessary requirement to manage the CDoH is establishment and implementation of monitoring and accountability frameworks, both for the actions of industry and those (especially inactions) of government. It is particularly critical for civil society and international bodies to monitor and advocate for transparency in government-industry relations. For example, the Framework Convention Secretariat, through the adopted guidelines of Article 5.3, plays a critical role in supporting governments to separate decision-making bodies from industry influence.

Governments also need to play a stronger role in managing conflicts of interest and in holding industry accountable. Governments can use a quasi-regulatory, "scaffolding" approach to managing conflicts of interest, where they take a leading role in monitoring performance of the private sector's self-regulatory activities and imposing stronger actions when required (Kraak et al. 2014; Reeve and Magnusson 2015).

3. Alternative livelihoods

In response to the economic implications of reducing consumption of tobacco and unhealthy food – and to mitigate some of the commercial concerns – there have been efforts to support alternative livelihoods (Thow et al. 2021). The FCTC actually obliges ratifying countries to support alternatives for (generally poor) tobacco farmers, and there is emerging evidence that farmers who shift away from tobacco do better as a result. The use of contract farming, however, has many tobacco-growing households trapped in debt cycles to leaf-buying companies; and only strong government support to create fair financial loan programs and alternative supply chains is likely to break this hold (Lencucha et al. 2020).

Some of these challenges and opportunities are also relevant to strengthen production of healthy, nutrient-rich food. As with transitioning tobacco farmers into other crops, governments can provide incentives along the supply chain that make growing healthy food easier and economically attractive for farmers (Lencucha et al. 2020). This will require reforming agriculture subsidy programs that have been criticized to be skewed towards staple foods which provide the raw material for the manufacture of unhealthy food products. Linking local agriculture to nutritious diets through programs such as home-grown school feeding initiatives is another way to provide local markets and income for farmers. The government in Brazil successfully implemented this approach and requires that at least 30% of foods used in school feeding programs be sourced from family farmers and local rural enterprises (Hawkes et al. 2016). Interventions that reduce the cost barrier associated with healthy food products also increase demand for fruit and vegetables (An 2013) especially when coupled with consumer food literacy activities (Brimblecombe et al. 2017).

Interventions along the food/agriculture supply chain

Agriculture policy should strengthen agriculture systems to grow nutritious food for in-country consumption as well as for export. Governments can incentivize growing of diverse nutritious foods beyond the staples to curb monocropping and its threat to food-related biodiversity. Targeted support, especially for small enterprises (small businesses and small farms) that produce healthy foods, is required as a more agroecological approach to food production shows potential to improve both availability of and access to healthy foods (SALSA

Image C3.5 "Helping British Columbians access healthy food."
Source: BC Gov Photos on flickr. https://www.flickr.com/photos/45802067@N03/28191573504. Licensed under CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

2020) (see Chapter C5). Support to local farmers' markets is one example. Countries, especially LMICs, can target processing, storage, and preservation capacities to retain nutritional value and food safety, and to reduce seasonality and postharvest losses. This should extend to store and/or government agency stocking requirements to mandate or incentivize these establishments to stock a minimum percentage of locally produced fruits and vegetables.

Conclusion

The CDoH play a crucial role in shaping consumer environments. The bad news is that the purveyors of unhealthy commodities remain organized in their opposition to see public health regulations as threats to their continuing global diffusion and profitable market shares. Through lobbying, marketing, litigation, and CSR activities, their corporate influences over government policy and consumer behavior persist. These efforts persisted even during the COVID-19 pandemic. The good news is that effective measures such as labeling and taxation policies continue to be implemented by governments, despite extensive opposition from various interests, and have succeeded in reducing consumption of health-harming products in many parts of the world.

Activists, however, need to keep the pressure on governments, especially those in LMICs that are arguably more vulnerable economically to the influences of transnational corporations and the lure of FDI. At a deeper structural level, governments must also work to promote healthy product producing companies to ensure that healthy choices are appealing, accessible, and affordable.

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