

# A FRAMEWORK OF NGO INSIDE AND OUTSIDE STRATEGIES IN THE COMMERCIAL DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH

## Corporate tactics

Much is known about the tactics corporate actors use to influence government policy and regulation and to increase their sales and profits:



Lobbying and political donations



Co-opting health professionals and policymakers to promote industry objectives



Partnering with governments



Intimidating critics



Engaging in multistakeholder platforms



Undermining legitimate science and reframing debate



Funding research biased in favour of industry



Promoting corporate social responsibility initiatives

## A study of non-government organisations (NGOs)

Less is known about how to counter these corporate tactics. Our recent study addressed this gap through a narrative review of 144 studies focused on NGOs and the ways they try to influence government and corporate actors. NGOs have sought to influence government and commercial actors across many industry sectors, including:



Extractive



Tobacco



Food



Pharmaceuticals



Alcohol



Gambling



Weapons



Textiles



Asbestos

## A framework of NGO strategies in the commercial determinants of health

Target: **Commercial actor**

Target: **Government / Intergovernmental**

Inside strategies

- ➔ Forming partnerships and multistakeholder initiatives
- ➔ Holding private meetings and roundtables
- ➔ Engaging with company annual general meetings and shareholders
- ➔ Collaborating other than a partnership; including via the participation in the development of industry standards, reports, CSR initiatives
- ➔ Pursuing litigation directly against industry

- ➔ Lobbying; including via formal consultation processes (e.g. submissions), serving on committees and in delegations, and informal interactions with policymakers
- ➔ Drafting legislation, policies and standards; including co-producing reports
- ➔ Providing technical support and training; including funding government activities and taking on implementation roles
- ➔ Pursuing litigation against government

Outside strategies

- ➔ Monitoring and reporting on commercial practises; including developing 'counter accounts' to debunk industry claims, calling out industry funded groups, 'naming and shaming' in mainstream media and social media campaigns
- ➔ Protests at industry sites
- ➔ Boycotts
- ➔ Directly engaging with the public in campaigns, including mass letterboxing and coordinating mass petitions
- ➔ Creative use of alternative spaces; including via public documentaries of corporate activities

- ➔ Protests and public campaigning calling for regulation; including via mainstream media and social media
- ➔ Monitoring and reporting, including monitoring government compliance with international treaties and generating evidence for monitoring
- ➔ Forum shifting debate from one policy forum to another – vertically within government and horizontally to the global level
- ➔ Proposing and initiating alternative sources of economic development

# Examples



**NGO shareholder engagement** has included briefing, consulting and advising shareholders, and enabling NGOs from low income countries to speak at shareholder and company meetings in the US, Canada, Australia, and France.



In South Africa, **NGO litigation** against pharmaceutical firms over lack of access to HIV/AIDS treatment has resulted in companies being found guilty of abusing antitrust law.



**NGO monitoring** includes the development of 'counter accounts' to challenge industry claims and provide alternative evidence on impacts to health.



**Creative use of alternative spaces** include producing documentaries, the formation of an alternative International People's Health Tribunal, and holding community arts projects.



In the Philippines, NGOs have **drafted** mining moratoriums with local government actors, and in Bangladesh NGOs have drafted nutrition policy on infant breastfeeding.



NGOs have **forum shifted** to UN committees to shame Nigeria, Russia, and Ghana on extractive governance. NGOs have also forum shifted to the FCTC Conference of Parties to shame high and low income country governments for lack of FCTC tobacco control compliance.



NGOs have engaged in multistakeholder initiatives to influence corporate actors. It is important to assess the appropriateness of engagement to avoid undue influence on policy. For example, a study of a **partnership** between a tobacco firm and an environmental NGO found that this enabled the tobacco firm to have a greater influence on government policymaking.

## Evidence generated by NGOs in monitoring and campaigning

- ➔ Scientific studies. For example, NGOs in India conducted a study of soft drink products, identifying pesticide residue, informing a campaign against the company.
- ➔ Human Rights Impact Assessments
- ➔ Specific health evidence. For example, an NGO produced a study of cancer risks from a company pesticide, informing a boycott and media campaign.
- ➔ Local evidence - highlighted as important to support transnational NGO campaigns on the ground
- ➔ Purchasing power studies
- ➔ Public opinion polling
- ➔ Economic evidence
- ➔ Personal stories



This examination of peer-reviewed literature identified 18 'inside' and 'outside' strategies used by NGOs to target government and commercial actors. In doing so, it offers a suite of strategies that can be used to influence policy and governance for health and health equity, depending on the appropriateness and effective prevention of conflict of interest.



### Reference:

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