

AACI Update-8

December 2017



A conflict of interest may be defined as a set of conditions in which professional judgement of a primary interest, such as making decisions on the merits of legislation tends to be unduly influenced by a secondary interest, such as a personal financial gain.

~[Dennis F. Thomson](#)

Protecting people against vested interests in public policy

The purpose of this update is to provide specialised information on the issue of conflict of interest in policy and programmes across the globe to the concerned people including members of AACI, public interest groups, people fighting corruption, interested policy makers and others.

Varun Gandhi calls for a reform to bring Conflict of Interest Legislation in India

In an opinion piece given to The Hindu Feroze Varun Gandhi urged the Nation to bring reforms to have a mandatory conflict of interest framework. He emphasized that this will be crucial in preventing cases of corruption. Gandhi, shared stories of transparency across the globe. In the west, private ends were benefited by the public officials because of conflict of interest. Britain's history shows the widespread of conflict of interest between the rulers and their officials. The spread of education, the press and an independent judiciary placed limits on corrupt behavior in governance and by the 20th century, corruption gradually decreased.

Taking the example of Food Safety and Standards Authority of India, the regulatory board has been filled with conflict of interest and is captured by vested interest. FSSAI is theoretically supposed to be independent in monitoring food safety and yet, until 2014, industry representatives were regularly been appointed to scientific committees. Though a policy of Ministry of personnel in India does has rules to address revolving door mechanisms but there is no codified mechanism.

Gandhi states that there is nothing wrong in letting experienced bureaucrats utilise their expertise in the private sector provided adequate rules are framed and followed that enable the elimination of any conflict of interest. Gandhi urged that its time that we as nation develop and encourage a culture of transparency.

He quoted that E.M.S. Natchiappan's private member's bill (The Prevention and Management of Conflict of Interest Bill, introduced in 2012) should be the way forward. The country needs legislation to non -disclose of conflict of interest punishable. He also urged the implementation the Parliamentary Standing Committee on the Department of Personnel and Training (Report No. 60 dated May 3, 2013) recommendations to clean up business interests and strengthening a moral code over such conflicts. Without such transformation, India's society, governance and its private sector will remain open turf for insider trading. It is pertinent that the standing committee of parliament on corruption did recommend conflict of interest be included in "bribery".

Link: <http://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/a-necessary-reform/article22328707.ece/amp/>



Photo: https://www.outlookindia.com/public/uploads/gallery/20171117/Varun-gandhi_20171118_350_630.jpg

National Skill Development Corporation functioning alleged with conflict of interest



Photo:<http://www.thenewsnow.co.in/newsadmin/photo/229201717143296.jpg>

NSDC has not been able to fulfil its responsibilities for setting up sector skill councils(SSCs).And due to grave instances of conflict of interest and unethical practices, the committee panel proposed that the work of setting up of SSCs should be transferred to the regulator, the National Skill Development Agency (NSDA).

Link:<http://www.firstpost.com/india/skill-development-serious-conflict-of-interest-in-nsdcs-functioning-says-govt-panel-3407024.html>

In December 2016 report by Government's committee for Rationalization and Optimization of the Functioning of the Sector Skill Councils constituted to review the functioning of NSDC it was found out that there is grave conflict of interest in NSDC'S functioning and role. The afore mentioned committee panel recommended a strong review and oversight mechanism to correct things.

According to Sharada Prasad, former D-G of Employment and Training (DGE&T) and chair of the review committee



Photo:nutrition.tufts.edu/sites/default/files/styles/mobile_friendly/public/profilepictures/Dariush-Profile.jpg?itok=58G1pg90

Conflict of Interest Disclosure in Nutrition Research Should be Followed as Transparency Principle Says Academicians

In a recently published op-ed in the Journal of the American Medical Association in early May 2017 by Dr. Dariush Mozaffarian of the Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy at Tufts University titled "Conflict of Interest and the Role of the Food Industry in Nutrition Research" it was highlighted that Nutritional research is not supported by the federals as a result there is a gradual decrease in the quality by 22% in the total institutes of health funding from 2003 to 2013.

According to the op ed in the year 2009, only \$1.5 billion per year were spent on the nutritional research whereas \$60 billion per year were spent on the industry research. It was seen that food industry played a major role supporting nutrition research and tends to be biased because of vested interest. And, their unethical ad profit driven marketing and promotional tactics were also considered problematic. The op edraised a significant question, it pointed out on the way public should view the research supported by food industry; weighing the study supported by food industry in terms of transparency principles and public good is most important.

To avoid conflict of interest, defined and transparent principles should be implemented regarding Industry funding. In an ideal situation the industry sponsor should have no role in project design, implementation, analysis, or interpretation to minimizes the potential for bias. It was recommended that Federal support for nutrition research is important to minimize national health care spending and improve health.

Link : <https://integritydietitians.org/2017/05/04/conflict-interest-role-food-industry-nutrition-research/>

Niti Aayog panel on nutrition has conflict of interest: Activists

Nutrition Advocacy in Public Interest a think tank of public health and nutrition advocates and paediatricians wrote to the Niti Aayog vice chairman regarding the conflict of interest of nongovernmental officials in the Aayog's newly-constituted working group on nutrition. The think tank pointed out that members included food company lobbyists, people on the boards of multinational food companies and founders of startups selling nutritional supplements. They expressed concern over non-availability of information about how these members were selected. The memorandum listed 22 members in the working group with Dr Vinod Paul, Member of Niti Aayog, formerly of AIIMS Delhi, as the chairperson. The memorandum had no details of who selected the members or by what criteria.



Link: <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/business/india-business/niti-aayog-panel-on-nutrition-has-conflict-of-interest-activists/articleshow/61086604.cms>



Photo: <http://prehospitalresearch.eu/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/pubmedimage1.jpg>

PubMed the renowned medical journal

enforces disclosure of conflict of interest in researches

In March 2016, 62 scientists and physicians from around the world (including the head of the Center for Science in the Public Interest) lobbied for the disclosure of conflict of interest statement in scientific researches as a part of a broader transparency movement in science. The letter strongly urged all journals listed in PubMed to provide information about funding sources and other possible competing interests in all abstracts. Disclosure of researchers' financial relationships with drug, food, chemical, and other industries makes PubMed search results transparent and credible. This step is welcoming and would allow readers to be cautious of the bias a research study funded by industry could have on the results.

Link: <https://www.vox.com/2017/4/19/15350048/pubmed-publishing-conflicts-of-interest-funding-information>

Conflicts of Interest: My Journey through India's Green Movement

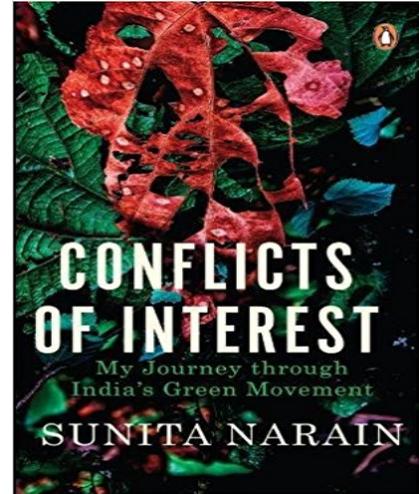


Photo: https://images-na.ssl-images-amazon.com/images/I/510IAMplxZL_SX309_BO1,204,203,200_.jpg

India's foremost environmentalist Sunita Narain launched a book on Conflict of Interest giving a personal account of her battles as part of the country's green movement. Narain in her book has spoken about how corporate lobbies and political interests often ruin their effective resolution. She has also thrown light on some widely reported controversies triggered by research undertaken by her along with her team at the Centre for Science and Environment. Conflicts of Interest also includes an 'environmental manifesto', a blueprint for the direction India must take if it is to deal with the emergency of climate change and environmental degradation.

Link: <https://www.thequint.com/lifestyle/books/sunita-narain-conflicts-of-interest-delhi-smog-air-pollution>

CONFLICT OF INTEREST: A Case for Legislation

About AACI

The Alliance Against Conflict of Interest (AACI) is an alliance of organisations and individuals working in various sectors – doctors, lawyers, women's and children's health groups, activists and media. AACI works on issues of/on 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 conflict of interest in all sectors in public policy and institutionalise ethics and transparency.

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