

Alliance Against Conflict of Interest (AACI)

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AACI/2014/02

September 2, 2014

Shri Narendra Modi
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Smt. Harsimrat Kaur Badal
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Subject: AACI denounces PepsiCo's attempts to enter in Mid Day Meal Scheme

Respected Sir/Madam,

New Delhi, 2nd.Sep.2014: Alliance Against Conflict of Interest (AACI), a group of organisations and individuals – doctors, lawyers, women and child health groups, activists and media, strongly condemns the negotiations held on 26th August 2014 between Minister of Food Processing Industries, Harsimrat Kaur and PepsiCo's chairperson Indira Nooyi to provide "healthy" processed foods as part of the Mid Day Meal (MDM). However, HRD Ministry's stand of totally opposing the use of processed food for the MDM scheme is appreciable.

It's ironical that a company like PepsiCo, which is one of the biggest producers of foods and beverages that are either unhealthy or have no nutritional value, such as Lays Potato Chips, nutritionally value less Kurkure, excessively sweetened colas, fruit juices with added sugar, etc. was even considered by the Food Processing Ministry to provide healthy meals for children under MDM scheme. It appears that this Ministry has little concern for the health of the people, especially children, of India, or even for the livelihoods of women's groups, who would have been displaced if PepsiCo were given the contract.

If the government takes this or such unconscionable steps it would be providing a platform to PepsiCo for getting free advertising and branding as a credible company. In our opinion in the coming future it will sequentially increase the consumption of their unhealthy or non-nutritious foods by children. There is no way we will allow our children to be made a captive market for their junk food through MDM.

It is well known that India is facing increasing prevalence of obesity and non-communicable disease which are caused mainly by unhealthy dietary patterns. According to WHO and leading science journals like Lancet, risks of sugary drinks

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and junk foods on health are high on obesity, diabetes and even deaths and anything that promotes the image of the junk food should be opposed by the government and civil society both.

Further, MDM also serves additional functions of enhancing communities' involvement in and knowledge of the role of diversity of food, reducing caste discrimination, improving the incomes of the especially marginalized rural women, who are engaged in preparing the meals, and building self-reliance in food security through consumption of diverse foods produced locally as meals. If mid-day meals are supplied by PepsiCo or any other contractor, these several aims of the programme will not be met.


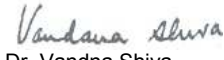
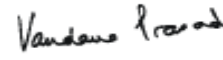
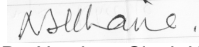


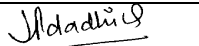




In the past AACI had been protesting against PepsiCo and Britannia for influencing the public policy on nutrition and tying up with the Andhra Pradesh government to distribute biscuits through the mid-day meal scheme in Hyderabad respectively for similar reasons.

According to Dr. Arun Gupta, Convener, AACI "It is evident that big food companies are here to make profits. PepsiCo has announced that it will be investing over Rs. 300 billion in the country. Using government's schemes, institutions and finances to strengthen brand presence and surrogate marketing through PPPs is the underlying tactic of corporations."

There is a need to ensure proper regulation and monitoring of MDM for food safety, as well as enabling school kitchens to provide safe meals by giving them proper space, utensils and training for cooking rather than getting into such dubious associations.

We strongly oppose bringing powerful profit-making economic actors into MDM Scheme and appeal Government of India to uphold the nutritional and social determinants of MDM in public interest by abstaining from such associations.

With kind regards,

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