Global Fund collusion with liquor giant is a clear conflict of interest
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Abstract Alcohol is the third leading contributor to death and disability in South Africa, where SABMiller is the major supplier of malt beer, the most popular beverage consumed. The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria (Global Fund) has recently included SABMiller as a recipient of funding for an education intervention aimed at minimizing alcohol-related harm, including HIV prevention, among men in drinking establishments. Global Fund support for this initiative is cause for concern. It is debatable whether these men are the best target group for the intervention, whether a drinking establishment is the best location, and whether the educational intervention itself is effective. Our experience is that the liquor industry is inclined to support alcohol interventions that will not affect drinking rates at a population level. These interventions allow the industry to simultaneously fulfill social and legal obligations to address the harmful use of alcohol while ensuring that sales and profits are maintained. Providing funding for a highly profitable industry that could afford to fund its own interventions also reduces the funds available for less well-resourced organizations. Do we take it that the problem of “corporate capture” has now spread to one of the largest health funders in the world?

SABMiller is a major beer supplier to approximately 34 000 licensed outlets in South Africa and through them an estimated 200 000 illegal outlets (called “shebeens”) that act as a de facto distribution arm. It has established an educational intervention that aims to minimize alcohol-related harm in men, and reduce male violence against women and children as well as the spread of HIV/AIDS.

The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria (Global Fund) has included SABMiller as a sub-recipient of its Round 9 funding in support of the brewery’s Tavern Intervention Programme for Men. 1 Global Fund support for this initiative is cause for concern because it reflects the successful attempt of a highly profitable industry to position itself as committed to public health objectives. In reality, the liquor industry’s aggressive marketing of its products is irrevocably linked with major health harms throughout the world, in South Africa in particular. As the impetus by government and nongovernmental organizations to address alcohol-related harm in South Africa has increased, we have seen an upsurge in efforts by the liquor industry to partner with government and public health agencies. Such partnerships lend legitimacy and provide a platform for the liquor industry to lobby against proposals to reduce the availability of alcohol, increase the price of alcohol through raising excise taxes and place restrictions on the marketing of alcohol, despite the global evidence that these measures are the most cost-effective way to decrease alcohol-related harm.

Alcohol is the third leading contributor to the disease burden in South Africa, 2 mainly through injury, particularly from interpersonal violence; infectious diseases, particularly tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS; and neuropsychiatric disorders. 3 At face value, a programme that aims to reduce HIV infection as well as violence against women and children is welcome, but it is debatable whether men who attend shebeens are the best target group for the intervention, whether a drinking establishment is the best location, and whether the educational intervention itself is effective. Our experience is that the liquor industry is inclined to support alcohol interventions that will not affect drinking rates at a population level. These interventions allow the industry to simultaneously fulfill social and legal obligations to address alcohol abuse while simultaneously ensuring that sales and profits are maintained. Eliciting funds earmarked for the global public good not only provides the liquor industry with free advertising and a mechanism to achieve its goals, but also reduces available funding for less well-resourced organizations.

Calls for accountability and good governance relating to the Global Fund and similar agencies have been increasing recently. 4 While it is commendable that the Global Fund has a zero-tolerance policy on corruption and misappropriation, 5 we would argue that it should also not fund organizations with conflicted interests. In the case of the liquor industry, that conflict arises in that the industry can appear to be dealing with the social responsibility requirement of addressing the harms associated with its products – in itself a form of advertising – with an intervention that does not reduce availability of alcohol or consumption of its products.

We believe this should place organizations that manufacture or sell alcoholic beverages off limits. The liquor industry is already highly profitable and aggressively markets products in developing countries that can least afford the high burden of disease and demand for health services that result from the use of these products. Despite submission of a request for the Global Fund to reconsider the award to SABMiller, no

**References**

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A response has been received to date. Do we take it that the problem of “corporate capture”, so clearly described in the field of nutritional research, has now spread to one of the largest health funders in the world?

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**Abstract**

Global Fund with SABMiller is a visible conflict of interest. Alcohol is the third leading cause of death and disability in sub-Saharan Africa, and SABMiller is the main supplier of malt beverages, the most commonly consumed beverage. The Global Fund, which aims to reduce alcohol-related harms including HIV prevention among men at liquor drinking venues, has recently included SABMiller among the funders of an educational intervention aimed at reducing alcohol-related harms, including HIV prevention. The support of the Global Fund for this initiative has raised concerns. The questions are: I. are these men the best target population for the intervention, II. is a bar the best location for the intervention, and III. is the educational intervention itself effective. Our experience is that the alcohol industry is disposed to support alcohol interventions that do not affect population-level alcohol consumption and can ensure the continuation of sales and profits. Providing funding for high-profit industries that will finance their own interventions limits resources available to high-risk groups. Can we assume now that the “corporate capture” problem has spread to one of the largest health funders in the world?
Резюме
Противоречия между Глобальным фондом и гигантом по производству алкогольных напитков представляют собой очевидный конфликт интересов

Алкоголь является третьей по значимости причиной смертности и инвалидности в Южной Африке, где компания SABMiller является основным поставщиком солодового пива, самого популярного у потребителей напитков. Глобальный фонд по борьбе со СПИДом, туберкулезом и малярией (далее Глобальный Фонд) недавно включил компанию SABMiller в число получателей средств, предназначенных для проведения в питьевых заведениях образовательных мероприятий, направленных на минимизацию вреда от употребления алкоголя, включая профилактику ВИЧ среди мужчин. Принципией для беспокойства является поддержка этой инициативы Глобальным фондом. Существуют сомнения по поводу того, являются ли эти мужчины наилучшей целевой группой для данных образовательных мероприятий. Эти мероприятия позволяют индустрии выполнить социально и правовые обязательства, направленные на устранение вреда от употребления алкоголя, и одновременно поддерживать уровень продаж и прибыли на прежнем уровне. Кроме того, предоставление финансирования высокорентабельной отрасли, которая может позволить себе финансирование собственных мероприятий, снижает возможности для направления средств менее обеспеченным организациям. Должны ли мы воспринимать это так, что проблема "торговли под влиянием корпораций" теперь распространяется и на один из самых больших фондов по поддержке здравоохранения в мире?

References