Un nuevo informe detalla cientos de ejemplos de industrias de productos básicos poco saludables, lideradas por el alcohol, la comida chatarra y las refresqueras, que aprovechan la pandemia de COVID-19

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Señalar virtudes, promoviendo daños: industrias de productos insalubres y COVID-19: un nuevo informe detalla cientos de ejemplos de industrias de productos básicos poco saludables, lideradas por las grandes empresas de bebidas alcohólicas, las grandes industrias alimentarias y las de refrescos, que aprovechan la pandemia de COVID-19 para obtener beneficios comerciales. Este informe plantea preocupaciones sobre la captura corporativa durante la pandemia por parte de las mismas industrias que están alimentando la carga de las ENT en todo el mundo y poniendo a las personas en mayor riesgo de sufrir consecuencias graves de COVID-19.

Jueves 10 de septiembre de 2020 (Londres, Reino Unido) - Las empresas cerveceras que adaptan sus logotipos a los iconos de los pulmones, las empresas de hamburguesas que rastrean geográficamente a los clientes con el atractivo de los obsequios y los gigantes de los refrescos que donan miles de latas a los hogares de comunidades en dificultades en México ilustran la multitud de formas en que las industrias de productos básicos insalubres han aprovechado la pandemia de COVID-19 para obtener beneficios comerciales, según lo expone hoy un nuevo informe, presentado durante la 3ª Semana Mundial de Acción contra las ENT.

El informe **Señalar virtudes, promoviendo daños: industrias de productos insalubres y COVID-19** (*Signalling Virtue, Promoting Harm: Unhealthy commodity industries and COVID-19).* [1] desarrollado por la Alianza de ENT (NCD Alliance [2]) y SPECTRUM Consortium [3], es una exposición preliminar y un análisis de tácticas y estrategias adoptadas por las industrias de productos básicos no saludables durante la pandemia de COVID-19. El informe describe cuatro estrategias principales: campañas de marketing adaptadas a la pandemia, programas de responsabilidad social corporativa, manipulación de entornos para las políticas y fomento de asociaciones con gobiernos, agencias internacionales y ONG.

Los autores señalan que tales acciones corren el riesgo de exacerbar la pandemia. “Desde los primeros días de la pandemia, hemos observado dos tendencias: la creciente evidencia epidemiológica de que las personas que viven con ENT están sufriendo peores resultados por COVID-19, y que muchos industriales de productos insalubres han

adaptado rápidamente sus estrategias en un intento de capitalizar sobre la pandemia y los encierros", dijo Lucy Westerman, Gerente de Políticas y Campañas de la Alianza de ENT y coautora del informe. "Es una amarga ironía que empresas como las del tabaco, el alcohol y la comida chatarra, cuyos productos aumentan el riesgo de ENT, poniendo así a las personas en mayor riesgo de sufrir la pandemia, se hayan posicionado como héroes y socios en la respuesta y hayan interferido en las políticas públicas que buscan proteger la salud de la población ".

El informe *Signaling Virtue, Promoting Harm* (*Señalar virtudes, promoviendo daños*) se realizó mediante ejemplos de colaboración colectiva de especialistas en incidencia e investigación de todo el mundo para aumentar la conciencia y la comprensión de cómo las empresas han respondido al COVID-19. Hasta la fecha, la iniciativa ha recibido un total de 786 presentaciones de más de 90 países de todo el mundo, siendo los países citados con mayor frecuencia el **Reino Unido** y los **Estados Unidos de América** (cada uno presentó 119), seguidos de **Australia** (56), **India**, (43), **México** (34), Brasil (29) y **Jamaica** (28).

Una gran mayoría de los ejemplos se refieren a actividades de la industria del alcohol y de fabricantes de alimentos y bebidas ultraprocesados (363 y 328 respectivamente), aunque el conjunto de datos también incluye presentaciones notables sobre sucedáneos de la leche materna, combustibles fósiles, juegos de azar y tabaco. Este informe preliminar documenta 100 ejemplos.

> "La COVID-19 ha otorgado a la salud mundial una prominencia sin precedentes y está iluminando poderosamente una ventana de política importante, una que es demasiado significativa para permitir que las industrias de productos no saludables definan la agenda en el futuro", dijo el **profesor Jeff Collin**, coautor del informe e investigador de SPECTRUM Consortium con sede en la Universidad de Edimburgo. "Por lo tanto, monitorear y contrarrestar sus esfuerzos para lograrlo es esencial para desarrollar enfoques coherentes para la salud y el desarrollo sostenible que puedan ayudar a reconstruir nuestros sistemas de salud de mejor manera para todas las personas".

Al examinar los 100 ejemplos de actividad empresarial en torno a la pandemia y considerar su importancia estratégica, el informe destaca una serie de hallazgos clave:

- La sorprendente coherencia con la que se han seleccionado tales acciones corporativas para promover prioridades estratégicas de larga data. Múltiples iniciativas presentadas públicamente como contribuciones a los esfuerzos nacionales o internacionales para combatir la pandemia y apoyar a las comunidades están diseñadas para promover marcas, productos y corporaciones cuyos intereses económicos frecuentemente entran en conflicto con los objetivos de salud pública.
- La rápida adaptación de las actividades de marketing y promoción para abordar un contexto comercial cambiante y explotar el bloqueo demuestra que una crisis global no desplaza la maximización de los ingresos de los accionistas como factor clave del comportamiento empresarial.
- La apropiación de las causas de la salud y la justicia social y de los trabajadores de primera línea en iniciativas ostensiblemente filantrópicas ilustra vívidamente cómo los programas de responsabilidad social empresarial están moldeados por prioridades promocionales y constituyen una forma específica de marketing.
- La pandemia creó nuevas oportunidades para que las empresas se posicionen como socios en el progreso de la salud y el desarrollo sostenible con gobiernos, organizaciones internacionales, agencias de salud y ONG líderes.
- El volumen y el alcance global de las acciones de las industrias de alimentos ultraprocesados y del alcohol demuestran la necesidad de impulsar los esfuerzos internacionales para gestionar los conflictos de intereses.
- Es de vital importancia garantizar que las iniciativas para abordar la pandemia sean coherentes con las prioridades relacionadas con la salud y el desarrollo, incluida la lucha contra las ENT de manera eficaz. Este imperativo plantea cuestiones importantes para los gobiernos y las organizaciones internacionales sobre sus interacciones con las industrias de productos básicos poco saludables.

> "La pandemia de COVID-19 continúa en todo el mundo y este informe debe verse como solo la punta del iceberg", dijo **Linda Bauld**, directora del consorcio de investigación SPECTRUM. "Está muy claro que las industrias de productos básicos poco saludables continuarán adaptando su compromiso con COVID-19 a medida que evolucionen la pandemia, las respuestas políticas y las crisis económicas. El mapeo de esta actividad es vital si queremos dar forma a una respuesta ajustada al COVID-19 y al mismo tiempo evitar que

se agrave aún más la epidemia de ENT preexistente ".

"Hay lecciones que aprender aquí para quienes lideran la respuesta de salud pública al COVID-19 y planifican nuestra seguridad sanitaria futura", dijo **Katie Dain**, directora ejecutiva de la Alianza de ENT. "*Señalar la virtud, promoviendo el daño* genera preocupaciones sobre la posibilidad de una captura corporativa de COVID-19. Vemos que las empresas están implementando estas tácticas de manera bastante consistente en todo el mundo, con el fin de congraciarse con los formuladores de políticas mientras apenas ocultan los intentos cínicos de debilitar las reglas actuales y evitar políticas futuras. Pero el impacto despiadado de COVID-19 en las personas que viven con ENT deja en claro que el cambio de política es más urgente que nunca. Para reconstruir mejor después de la pandemia, los gobiernos deben regular estas industrias de manera más estricta, para proteger a las personas contra las ENT prevenibles y hacer que nuestras sociedades sean más saludables y resistentes a futuras amenazas para la salud ".

Adaptar el marketing y las promociones, aumentando la disponibilidad

Durante la fase de emergencia por COVID-19 y con muchos países imponiendo bloqueos para contener el virus, las corporaciones se apresuraron a adaptar sus estrategias de marcado y promociones para aprovechar tanto la pandemia como las respuestas políticas asociadas. Un tema sorprendente en todos los ejemplos es la frecuencia con la que las industrias de productos básicos no saludables buscan vincular sus productos con el trabajo de los profesionales de la salud, los servicios de emergencia y otros trabajadores de primera línea durante la pandemia. Algunos ejemplos:

- En los **Estados Unidos**, la cadena de hamburguesas McDonald's "Lovin' Southeast Missouri" [4] pidió a los sanitarios que ayudaran a la cadena de comida rápida, ofreciendo una "comida de agradecimiento" gratis a los trabajadores de la salud, quienes, si compartían una foto con la marca, ayudarían a la franquicia a apoyar al banco de alimentos local.
- **Heineken Rusia** donó comidas a los trabajadores de la salud, pero también su bebida energética [5], *Solar Power*, para los médicos y enfermeras del turno de noche.
- **Red Bull Australia** recibió un reconocimiento en las redes sociales [6] por Lifeline Adelaide, por la "entrega sorpresa [de las bebidas energéticas] para ayudar a mantener a nuestros compañeros en la crisis reabastecidos mientras responden a las llamadas de apoyo".
- La empresa internacional de donuts **Krispy Kreme** también ha aprovechado COVID-19 en una campaña de marketing que supuestamente "sirviendo sonrisas" [7]al ofrecer a los trabajadores de primera línea de Nueva Zelanda, a los trabajadores sanitarios de EE.UU. y a los trabajadores clave del Reino Unido paquetes de donas gratuitos al mostrar la identificación de un trabajador sanitario. Krispy Kreme hizo una gran donación de donas a los trabajadores de la salud del Reino Unido, quienes luego publicaron un mensaje de agradecimiento en las redes sociales, que fue reconocido por la marca de la dona, aprovechando el hashtag #NHSheroes y sugiriendo que la marca era responsable de crear sonrisas #creatingsmiles y #servingsmiles.
- En **China**, una asociación entre **Pepsico** y **People's Daily China** propusieron las latas de refrescos de edición limitada impresas que celebraban a los que luchaban contra la pandemia, como los trabajadores de la salud, los científicos y los constructores de hospitales.
- El agradecimiento de **Coca-Cola** también se expresó a través de nuevos diseños de latas y botellas [8]que cambiaron rápidamente para dar las "gracias" en México destacando una serie de profesiones heroicas.

SIGUE EN INGLÉS (Traducción al español en curso):

Industry as COVID-19 Warriors

In their marketing and campaigns during COVID, unhealthy commodity industries have sought to present themselves as heroes. For example:

- In **India Lay's** Heartwork campaign [9] was an emotional ode seeking to recognise the 'real heroes' at 'every step of the journey from farm to finger' … working 'relentlessly against all odds to ensure Lay's brings joy to

millions', and which also provided a cross-promotion opportunity for other consumable brands. Lay's went on to engage influencers [10] to praise and raise visibility of the *Heartwork* campaign.

Some of the industry responses sought to invoke patriotism as the route to keep people engaged with their products:

- Frozen food manufacturer **McCain** sought to invoke a sense of civic duty in **Canada**, appealing to consumers to 'Eat More French Fries Canada! [11]', linking a call for increased consumption with supporting farmers affected by the pandemic.
- In the **United States,** the fast food chain **Burger King** produced several COVID-19 inspired adaptations to marketing and availability, including another example of invoking patriotic duty by encouraging **US** consumers to do their part and be "Couch pot-at-riots" [12], waiving delivery fees to encourage people to 'stay home', and donating ¼ million burgers to nurses via the American Nurses Federation.

Selling Social Distancing, Commodifying PPE

Unhealthy commodity industries have sought to leverage opportunities associated with the distinctive social and economic environments of the pandemic, including through developing product promotions that exploit a focus on social distancing, utilising face masks as advertising space, and inserting brand images into online video communication platforms:

- In **Brazil,** brewer **Karsten** adapted their logo and slogan, adapting the style of their logo to resemble a pair of lungs – the main site of COVID-19 infection – and attaching the slogan *"G**o**od beer is like air: you can't live without it"* while encouraging consumers to follow 3 key tips to survive with Karsten – "*isolate, use sanitiser and drink beer for fun".*
- In **Germany**, a promotions stunt by **Burger King** to keep customers socially distant centred on large paper "social-distance crowns", employing the chain's signature logo in wide-brimmed hats to keep customers 6 feet away from each other as restaurants reopened.
- A variation on this promotion was for the **US** beer Dos Equis [13]**,** who designed and promoted a Seis Foot Cooler, a 6-Foot 'Social Distancing Cooler' give-away to 'help you drink responsibly'.
- Bacardi developed a Snapchat lens [14] to encourage social distancing when bars re-opened and to reassure hospitality staff, patrons and policy makers that they are doing their bit to be part of the solution. Users of the app would be able to tell how far away other people were by being shown a Caribbean island when at a safe distance, but the screen turning red when within 1 metre of another person.
- In **Canada,** one early exponent was a **Subway** franchise [15] , offering 1 free facemask for 2 regular subs purchased and suggesting the deal was a great way to 'protect you and your kids'.
- In **India,** the beer brand **Bira** had already been producing branded facemasks used to protect from air pollution, which were re-marketed during the pandemic for a dual purpose, while **Budweiser Streetwear Co** launched a 'fashion forward' and 'essential' branded facemask design [16] through the new apparel brand to appeal to Indian millennials [17].

Branding Zoom

The newfound daily prominence of online video meeting platforms like Zoom also created new virtual 'billboard' opportunities in the form of branded custom backgrounds:

- Zoom has used McDonald's in New Zealand [18] and soda brands including Dr Pepper [19] as wallpaper.
- In **India**, **Kingfisher** beer was promoted via a set of "Good Times" wallpaper [20] backgrounds for use in video calls within the "Divided by screens, united by Kingfisher" campaign. Scenes of ideal beer-consuming environments were included such as bars, couches and sporting events, with the logo and drinks of beer in the hands of smiling, jovial characters.

Accelerating digitalisation, increasing availability

The head of alcohol industry trade association Spirits Europe highlighted how the crisis has accelerated trends in digitalisation [21], boosting e-commerce and placing a new emphasis on virtual interaction.

- AmBev sought to engage with the daily lives of Brazilian consumers by sponsoring a popular streaming concert series [22] promoting brands such as Brahma Duplo Malte, Bohemia and Budweiser. The company later reported that this platform has "375 million views so far breaking all viewing records possible, 24 times more earned media impressions than [for the] FIFA World Cup in 2018 [23].
- **KFC** and **Nintendo** joined forces in the **Philippines**, to blend the popular game Animal Crossing [24], fast food, and social media. For those monitoring KFC's global social media, they had the opportunity to find a time-limited invitation code facilitating access to a virtual KFC restaurant experience, with those players based in the Philippines eligible to receive real KFC give-aways upon finding the brand's embedded mascot Colonel Sanders and his code.
- In a move to gamify lockdown, **Burger King** offered a free whopper for those who 'caught' a QR-code moving around **US** TV screens [25].
- In an attempt to "be present in **Brazilian** people's daily lives" while "doing their bit" to support social distancing adherence, **Burger King** leveraged growing trends in digitalisation by asking users to agree to be monitored using a geolocation tool [26] and receive a free "Lockdown Whopper" in exchange for staying indoors the longest.
- **Pepsico** in the **US** launched 2 new direct-to-consumer websites [27] for their pantry and snack brands for consumers to buy without having to go through retailers, with the ability for consumers to create so-called "snack packs."
- In the **UK**, the Get Wine App was quick to push promotions of rapid alcohol delivery [28] within 30 minutes as lockdown restrictions came into force.

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Philanthropy

The mapping of CSR responses to COVID-19 highlights that unhealthy commodity industries have extensively used philanthropic and social responsibility initiatives as a corporate political strategy to build brand loyalty support in local communities and enhance reputation in wider society through addressing shortages and branded donations. In addition, CSR initiatives have performed a legitimating function in areas of reputational risk, such as single-use plastics and domestic violence.

Supporting communities to protect core interests

- In **Singapore,** consumers have been nudged by Tiger Beer to make an SGD 10 contribution to local F&Bs in return for redeemable 'digital drink vouchers'. The promotional website describes the brand as "standing in solidarity [29]" and "rallying for help to support our local community [29]" while "consumers stay off the streets as part of continued safe distancing measures [30]".
- The 'Apoie Um Restaurante [31]' campaign in **Brazil** is framed as creating a social movement "which will help more establishments to go through this difficult time [31]" by offering a 50% discount subsidised by **Ambev** breweries and **Nestlé**.
- In **Ecuador**, **AB InBev** have created Tienda Cerca [32] – a WhatsApp-based online food delivery service for closed neighbourhood stores that also functions as an online store for an **AB InBev** company. While the platform is described in public-facing materials as supporting 70,000 small businesses, the website prompts participating stores to purchase direct from the **Bavaria Brewer**.
- Promoted through the French Embassy in South Africa [33]'s Twitter account, **Pernod Ricard South Africa's** 'Keep The Spirit [34]' initiative offers a supplementary wage of R500 (R2 million in total) to "help alleviate the economic impact on members of the bar and restaurant community" for staff that sign-up to training materials about its premium brands.
- In **India**, the **AB InBev** brand **Budweiser** has partnered with the media brand **Mixmag** to livestream DJ sets, donating INR 1.5 lakhs per view to a non-governmental COVID-19 relief organisation for at-risk nightlife workers [35].
- In **Mexico**, **FEMSA –** the giant Coca-Cola bottling group and convenience store chain - and **Nestlé**, have pledged to donate packs of Nestlé breast-milk substitutes to vulnerable communities in Veracruz, with **FEMSA** also distributing unhealthy snacks and sugar-sweetened beverages to families living in deprived neighbourhoods of Monterrey.
- A donation of 3,000 packs of sugar-sweetened beverages from **Coca-Cola Ghana** provided a marketing opportunity with the Deputy Minister of Information being interviewed [36] on a national news channel in front of a Coca-Cola branded screen.

Addressing shortages and health systems strengthening

- As part of its Give Meals, Give Hope [37] project, **PepsiCo India** and the **PepsiCo Foundation** have supported the WHO Collaborating Centre **Foundation for innovative New Diagnostics (FIND)** to procure and distribute 25,000 COVID-19 test kits in coordination with the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare. A press release from **FIND** welcomed this initiative from **PepsiCo India** "to support the scale up of India's COVID-19 testing capacity [38]" with the Head of Country Operations, Sanjay Sarin, describing the initiative as "critical [38]" to scale up COVID-19 testing capacity.
- In **Paraguay**, Coca-Cola donated personal protective equipment to the **National Institute of Respiratory Diseases**, including 22,000 surgical masks, 5,000 N95 respirators, and 2,000 surgical gowns. The **Ministry of Health** described **Coca-Cola Paraguay** as having a "desire to contribute to the strengthening of the health system and support the efforts of the National Government [39]".
- **South African Breweries (SAB)** claims to have donated 100,000 face shields [40] made from recycled beer crates to a sub-national health department.

Corporate philanthropy and COVID-19 funds

Beyond CSR to address shortages in health systems, large philanthropic donations have been used to secure legitimacy and manage corporate reputations by some of the largest companies.

- **Japan Tobacco International** made a USD $300,000 donation to health facilities and schools in the Kaoma and Nkeyema Districts of **Zambia**.
- **MARS** donated USD $2 million to the World Food Programme, described by its CEO as "doing our part to prevent the spread of the virus and caring for our communities [41]."
- **AB InBev** Urban Development Foundation donated RMB 1 million in cash to the Pingfang District government in **China**.

Moreover, the establishment of **COVID-19 Emergency Funds** in several countries in sub-Saharan Africa have provided unhealthy commodity industries with invaluable opportunities to secure legitimacy, project solidarity, and build relationships with policy makers:

- **Kenya** – the emergency fund launched by President Kenyatta is chaired by the managing director of Kenya Breweries [42], Jane Karuku, while a donation of Sh10.6m by BAT Kenya [43] puts the country's largest cigarette manufacturer among the main contributors to the fund.
- **Uganda** – a national address by President Museveni named two tobacco companies, **Leaf Tobacco and Merchandise Ltd** and **Meridian Tobacco Company**, among those listed as prominent contributors to national fundraising efforts, with a combined contribution of around Ugx. 250 000. Other contributors to Uganda's national COVID-19 fund include **Coca-Cola Beverages Africa.** Their donation of Ugx.1.3billion and gift of three pick-up trucks to the Ministry of Health's COVID-19 fleet received a public welcome from the Prime Minister, Ruhakana Rugunda, praising Coca-Cola as having been "a long-standing partner with us in many ways. Let's continue the fight against COVID-19 together." [44]
- **Ghana**-The COVID-19 Trust Fund established by the government received a high profile donation from the global online gambling company **Betway** [45]**.** Ghana's Trust Fund has also received a diverse range of product donations from across unhealthy commodity industries. **Guinness Ghana Breweries**, the local operating company of leading spirits producer **Diageo**, provided the Ministry of Information with 1,500 packs of its Malta Guinness [46]. The **Tolaram Group** donated GHS1 million and a package of their products to the COVID-19 national Trust Fund, with their products being directed to vulnerable households during lockdown in support of the government's food assistance programme. **Total Petroleum Ghana** made a presentation to the COVID-19 national Trust Fund comprising of 100 Total Cards [47], each with a value of 230 litres of fuel, worth a total sum of GH¢100,000.

Moreover, **several companies have made a concerted effort to link responses to COVID-19** with existing corporate philanthropy in other areas. For example:

- In its press release announcing a USD $20 million 'Community Fund' to address the "disproportionate social and economic impact of COVID-19 on black communities and businesses" in the **United States**,

Diageo underlined the importance of "long-standing partnerships with the National Urban League and the NAACP Legal Defense Fund [48]".
- The **Pepsico Foundation** announced a similar USD 7 million initiative to "provide increased medical and economic aid to communities of colour across the country [49]" including USD $1 million to the civil rights organisation National Urban League [50].

Pursuing Partnerships, Coveting Collaboration

Unhealthy commodity industries have also sought to advance strategic objectives through extensive collaborations. Nationally, these have included donations via partnerships with government ministries, hospitals and health agencies, as well as with key third sector service providers. Unhealthy commodity industries have also sought to link with leading international organisations and NGOs, and have widely depicted themselves as partners in global health and development. Such collaborations promise diverse benefits for industry, including association with the legitimacy and reputation of more trusted partners, enhanced access to elites, and the promotion of ineffective policies that don't challenge commercial interests.

Partnering with Governments

- In **Jamaica**, CSR initiatives undertaken by the local spirits producer **J Wray and Nephew (JWN)**, were presented as a partnership involving the Rural Agricultural Development Authority and the Ministry of Industry, Commerce, Agriculture and Fisheries [51]. This entailed provision of "food packages, supermarket vouchers, hand sanitisers, masks, and JWN products [52]".
- In Florida, a testing site was advertised via a **Pepsi-sponsored poster**, with location details accompanied by Pepsi and Walmart logos, the image of a large glass of iced soda, and the 'That's what I like' Pepsi slogan.

Collaborating with Civil Society

- In the **United States**, the **American Red Cross** was listed among recipients of a $500,000 donation from Altria [53], the parent company of Philip Morris USA and manufacturers of Marlboro. In **Croatia**, BAT [54] describes "donating funds to the Red Cross to provide food parcels to communities in tobacco growing areas". In **Romania**, Philip Morris is reported to have donated EUR 900,000 [55] for medical equipment and PPE via the Red Cross.
- In the **Philippines, the Red Cross** received a P15-million laboratory to boost its COVID-19 testing capacity from the **Lucio Tan Group** [56], whose companies include the tobacco company **PMFTC** tobacco company as well as **Asia Brewery** and **Tanduay Distillers.**
- The Netherlands-based brewing giant **Heineken** announced a donation of €15 million [57] to support the work of the **International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC),** particularly in Africa, Asia and Latin America.
- In **Thailand**, **PepsiCo** partnered with the anti-poverty agency **Raks Thai,** a member of CARE International, to reach vulnerable communities across Thailand. The 'Give for Hope' partnership with Raks Thai [58] was announced as a commitment of USD $550,000 (Bt 18 million) from PepsiCo Thailand, Suntory PepsiCo Beverages Thailand and the PepsiCo Foundation to support communities, farmers and health workers. Within this, the 'Give Meals Give Hope' project in Thailand was established with the objective of distributing over one million meals in 3 months.
- The majority of **PepsiCo**'s reported distribution of USD $5 million via charitable organisations is allocated to food banks in **Australia, Belgium, Egypt, France, the Netherlands, New Zealand, the UK;** and in Latin America via the **Global FoodBanking Network** where it supports work across **Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Guatemala, Mexico, Panama, Peru** and **Uruguay**.
- The **Global FoodBanking Network**, along with **Food Donation Connection** and **Feeding America** also constitute key partners for **McDonald's** increased food donations in the context of the rapid decline in customers across their fast food restaurants.

Global partnerships and collaborations with leading health and development agencies

- The creation of the **COVID-19 Solidarity Response Fund for WHO**: While its due diligence processes

prohibit funding from alcohol, arms, and tobacco industries [59], COVID-19 has provided opportunities for ultra-processed food and drink manufacturers to signal active engagement in the global response. Hence **PepsiCo**'s account of its funding towards a global response notes that "USD $2 million is going to the World Health Organization COVID-19 Solidarity Response Fund". **Mondelez International Foundation** is also listed among the list of the Fund's supporters [60], while the **Starbucks Foundation** committed USD $1 m [61]illion.

- In both Central Asia and Latin America, the **Coca-Cola Foundation** has engaged with the **UN Development Program (UNDP)** in COVID-19 response initiatives presented as demonstrating the value of partnership approaches to promoting health and sustainable development. In **Armenia,** a UNDP webpage detailing a collaboration to supply emergency medical equipment states that the Coca-Cola Foundation and UNDP "provide global and local solutions to improve the situation [62]", with the UNDP Resident Representative describing collaboration with the private sector as "critical to prevent and better manage such crises." In **Tajikistan**, UNDP were the recipients of a $50,000 donation [63] from the Coca-Cola Foundation to purchase PPE, disinfectants and hand sanitizer. In **Bolivia**, the Coca-Cola Foundation donated $299,153 [63] via UNDP to provide assistance to healthcare workers and vulnerable populations.

Shaping policy environments

COVID-19 has provided unhealthy commodity industries with scope to advance preferred policy positions, particularly as governments struggle to reconcile health objectives with economic and trade imperatives. Key activities have included lobbying to have unhealthy commodities designated as 'essential' products; petitioning to accelerate the easing of lockdown; working to undermine health and environmental regulations; and attempting to shape strategies for economic recovery.

Unhealthy commodities classed as 'essential'

As governments implemented lockdown restrictions, producers of tobacco, alcohol and processed foods lobbied to have their products categorised as part of the essential supply chain. Governments in several countries included these products on official lists of 'essential' commodities so that their manufacture, distribution and sale would not be interrupted during national lockdowns:

- In **Bangladesh** – one of the largest tobacco markets in the world – the Ministry of Industry declared cigarettes an 'essential commodity' [64] and instructed its regional offices to cooperate with tobacco companies in ensuring the production and distribution of cigarettes was not interrupted during the country's lockdown response. The decision followed submissions to the Minister from local subsidiaries of British American Tobacco and Japan Tobacco International [65].
- The government in **Kenya** included tobacco, alcohol and processed food and beverages [66] on their official list of essential items and services.
- In **Europe**, lobby groups for the alcohol [67] and processed food [68] industries called on governments to ensure the ongoing production and distribution of their products – at the same time that unions [69] were calling for a pause on non-essential production to protect workers' health and safety. FoodDrinkEurope called on EU Member States to "recognise the entire food supply chain as essential [68]" in order to ensure that food industry employees could continue to work and products would move freely across borders. Spirits Europe similarly called on governments to "Recognise the strategic importance of the food supply chain, including the spirits sector, as an essential activity [67]".
- **The** UK government [70] **subsequently included off-licence retailers in their list of essential shops that could stay open during the lockdown,** leading breweries to call for relaxation of regulations governing licenced businesses.
- Alcohol delivery sales were permitted by some local authorities in England [71] and Scotland [72].

Pressures on public health and environmental regulation.

There are multiple examples of health-damaging industries seeking exemptions or the weakening of regulatory restrictions on their activities during government lockdowns – particularly in high income countries, where regulatory controls are often viewed as being more restrictive. While relaxation or suspension of regulatory controls was usually called for as part of governments' emergency responses to COVID-19, there have been growing demands from businesses for such measures to be maintained or even extended in order to boost economic recovery in the post-crisis period.

- The **Canadian** government was lobbied by the oil industry [73] to suspend environmental regulations relating to pollution monitoring and Indigenous rights during the COVID-19 crisis.
- In **Europe**, car manufacturers similarly called for a delay in the introduction of industry carbon emission targets [74] due to the COVID-19 crisis.
- Alcohol producers in several jurisdictions (including Sweden, and the European Union [75]) lobbied for lower alcohol taxes as a crisis measure.
- In **France**, the government came under pressure to reverse its longstanding ban on alcohol sponsorship of sports events [76].
- In **Scotland**, the government agreed to withdraw a new bill introducing restrictions on junk food promotions [77].

Pressure to accelerate emergence from lockdown

In countries where the activities of unhealthy commodity industries were restricted during lockdown periods, businesses were vocal in calling for such restrictions to be lifted as early as possible. Bans on alcohol sales were a particular target for such efforts:

- The government of **South Africa** was unusual in imposing a complete ban on alcohol sales in the early stages of the country's COVID-19 crisis, in an effort to reduce pressure on hospitals and emergency services [78]. The ban was initially lifted on 1 June [79] but subsequently re-imposed on 12 July amidst strong industry opposition [80].
- The **Thai** government – which, like South Africa, introduced an alcohol ban as part of its COVID-19 response – similarly came under pressure from the industry to allow alcohol sales to resume. Industry representatives called on the Thai government to allow takeaway and home delivery sales, and to provide tax relief to alcohol producers [81]. The government subsequently lifted the ban much earlier than initially anticipated [82].
- In **Australia**, representatives of the alcohol industry lobbied the state government in Western Australia to relax restrictions on take-away alcohol sales on the basis that these unfairly penalised local business [83] and that alcohol is "a way of life for many Australians and in moderation it's good for your health [84]". The state government subsequently removed restrictions on alcohol sales [85] after the industry advocated its own voluntary initiative to limit alcohol sales [83]; however the voluntary initiative was discontinued after two weeks on the basis that sales were down and that "All evidence points to Australians continuing to enjoy moderate alcohol consumption as part of a healthy, balanced lifestyle [86]".
- In **Australia**, representatives of the gambling industry worked within a state-appointed taskforce [87] providing recommendations to the Victorian government for the re-opening of casinos and other hospitality venues.

Attempts to shape recovery strategies

While the weakening of regulatory controls is being widely presented as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic, there is evidence that unhealthy commodity industries regard the crisis as an opportunity to shape policies in the longer term. This is particularly evident in relation to the **alcohol industry**: beer producers in Europe and North America have actively lobbyied governments to **introduce or extend tax relief** in the medium term:

- **Beer producers** across **Europe** have called for reductions to value-added (sales) taxes [88] to support the alcohol industry post-COVID-19.
- The German government's decision to lower sales tax on alcohol from 19 to 16% [89] was highlighted by the European brewing industry as a 'creative' initiative.
- Industry representatives asked the European Commission to encourage other Member States to offer similar tax relief [90] as part of the region's post-pandemic Recovery Plan, and launched a #RECONNECT [91] campaign to generate public support for such measures. In response, the European Commission "welcome[d] the initiatives and support that the brewers have provided to date during the pandemic [92]" and noted that it had "suggested to Member States to show flexibility" with regard to sales tax [92]."
- Beer producers in **Canada** called on their federal government to follow the example of various European countries in providing tax relief [93], with the UK held up as an exemplar for suspending further increases in alcohol excise tax.
- The Scotch Whisky Association called for the **Scottish government** to abandon proposed advertising

restrictions [94] and offered to engage in "a sustained dialogue with government on smart taxation [94]" in order to support the post-COVID-19 recovery. They also petitioned the **UK government** to protect free trade in alcohol in order to "help with the post Covid-19 economic recovery [95]", warning that tariffs risk "undermining any 'bounce back' recovery [96]" ;
- The Irish Whiskey Association [97] and Drinks Ireland [97] have called on the **Irish government** to support the employment of 'brand ambassadors' in key overseas markets.

ENDS

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About the SPECTRUM CONSORTIUM [99]

The SPECTRUM Consortium is funded by the UK Prevention Research Partnership, a unique collaboration that aims to conduct research to prevent and address harm to health from unhealthy commodities by using systems science to identify and evaluate solutions. It brings together 10 Universities in the UK and one in with leading alliances that aim to improve health and reduce inequalities in the UK and further afield, along with Public Health England, Health Scotland, Public Health Wales and two independent companies specialising in statistical modelling and retail data.

About the NCD Alliance [100]

The NCD Alliance (NCDA) is a unique civil society network of 2,000 organisations in 170 countries, dedicated to improving NCD prevention and control worldwide. Our network includes NCDA members, national and regional NCD alliances, scientific and professional associations, and academic and research institutions. Together with strategic partners, including WHO, the UN and governments, NCDA is transforming the global fight against NCDs.

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CDOH [102]
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alcohol [105]
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