Unhealthy commodity producers, conflict of interest and effective health governance

Jeff Collin
Global Public Health Unit,
School of Social & Political Science
University of Edinburgh
jeff.collin@ed.ac.uk
NCDs: risk factors & unhealthy commodity industries

• Substantially preventable by addressing leading risk factors, mainly tobacco use, unhealthy diet, physical inactivity and the harmful use of alcohol.

• NCDs best understood as ‘industrial epidemics’ “driven at least in part by corporations and their allies who promote a product that is also a disease agent” - Jahiel & Babor 2008

• Inevitable tensions between economic interests of key actors and global health objectives

• Policy significance of managing conflict of interest
“extent to which conflicts between policy agendas are minimized and synergies maximized” – Blouin 2007

Stark contrasts across NCD policies:

• WHO FCTC, Art. 5.3: “in setting and implementing their public health policies ..... Parties shall act to protect these policies from commercial and other vested interests of the tobacco industry”

• partnership & voluntary approaches to alcohol & nutrition

• Participation of alcohol & ultra-processed food producers in UN HLM, WHO reform & GCM
Strategic similarities

“There are considerable commonalities between tobacco and alcohol industry political activity, with differences due potentially to differences in policy contexts and perceived industry legitimacy.”

– Savell et al 2015
One unhealthy commodities industry?
Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages

3.d Strengthen the capacity of all countries, in particular developing countries, for early warning, risk reduction and management of national and global health risks

17.14 Enhance policy coherence for sustainable development