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for every child

Webinar 4
Effective advocacy and communications strategies to support food environment policy campaigns

14 July 2022

This document summarizes the presentations and perspectives provided by speakers representing the UN, academia and civil society during this webinar. This webinar is part of a series to build the knowledge and capacity of UNICEF nutrition staff and partners. The term 'food industry' is used to refer to large manufacturers of ultra-processed and unhealthy food and beverages.

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Summary of key points and resources

Key points

▶ Advocating for policy change is usually a long, dynamic process. It is important to be systematic, organized and disciplined when planning a campaign.

▶ Key elements of policy advocacy are gathering evidence, conducting a political mapping, developing an advocacy strategy (including setting advocacy objectives), engaging internally and externally, and monitoring and evaluation. Key elements of media advocacy are developing a media advocacy action plan (including setting communications objectives, conducting a media mapping, defining the target audience and developing key messages and selecting the media advocacy tactics), creating a media contact registry, and monitoring and evaluation.

▶ The key elements should be tailored to the specific policy goal(s), country context and cultural and political norms.

▶ Shift the narrative away from individual responsibility for overweight and obesity towards promoting preventative policies[1] that create healthy food environments.

▶ Use positive advocacy instead of negative messaging, showing that policy solutions do exist, and food environments can be improved to be healthier.

▶ Use messaging based on accepted values rather than facts-based messaging. Altruistic values to use could be honesty, equality, and justice.

▶ Use gain-framed messaging, showing the gains and benefits of taking action to improve food environments.

▶ Avoid using language and visuals that perpetuate weight stigma.

▶ Think beyond the obvious primary target audience of policy and decisionmakers, and also focus on the public and investors.

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[1] The webinar series focuses on the following four policies to support a healthy food environment, which are discussed in detail in the summary sheet of webinar 2: restrict marketing of unhealthy foods and beverages; establish interpretative front-of-pack nutrition labelling to help identify unhealthy foods; introduce fiscal measures to encourage healthy diets (e.g., taxes on sugary drinks); set standards for food and beverages available in and around daycare centers, preschools, and schools. Webinar 1 focused on food industry interference in policy-making, webinar 2 provided an overview of core elements of healthy food environment policies, and webinar 3 looked at legal issue in policy design and implementation.

1 Why is advocacy important?

In 2019, an estimated 38.2 million children under 5 had overweight or obesity. Over 340 million children and adolescents aged 5-19 had overweight or obesity in 2016. Childhood overweight and obesity affects countries of all income-levels (see Figure 1). Few countries have reversed the continued increase in childhood obesity and no country is making progress on adult obesity. In many countries policy efforts have also failed. Key barriers to successful food policy adoption are industry interference and a narrative that is often focused on individual responsibility rather than a collective responsibility to protect children and create healthy food environments. Additionally, overweight and obesity are often framed as a medical issue rather than one symptom of preventable diet-related chronic disease.

To stop and reverse the current trends in overweight and obesity, major policy progress is needed. If we are to achieve this goal, we must learn from policy successes which show that significant advocacy efforts are needed to counter industry interference and shift the narrative. The primary advocacy targets are government policy-makers who have the power to put in place laws and standards that protect children. Another primary target audience is the public, to generate a sense of outrage and demand for policy action. Food industry actors are a secondary audience that can be targeted directly or via investors.

Figure 1. Childhood overweight and obesity affects countries of all income-levels

- **Urgent and growing**
  380 million children worldwide

- **A global issue**
  HICs, LMICs, rural, urban

- **Misunderstood and costly**
  Global economic impact $2 trillion (2.8% GDP)

- **Blatant manifestation of inequality**
  In many regions, greatest burden on LSE groups

- **Embedded in stigma**
  Children and parents suffer from blame and bullying

- **A perfect storm**
  The triple burden + COVID + climate

- **Recognized by global mandates**
  SDG, Decade of Action on Nutrition, WHO Commission

- **An issue of child rights**
  We must protect every child's right to good nutrition

2 What are guiding principles of advocacy and communications to support policy campaigns for healthy food environments?[2]

1 Effective messaging

The following four strategies help create effective advocacy messages that are values-based and gain-framed:

▶ Describe an attractive and relatable vision for children's nutrition and health. For example, describe food environments in which healthy foods are easily accessible and available to all children to support their optimal development.

▶ Frame the required actions as positive, achievable, and simple solutions that will generate a better future for parents and their children.

▶ Identify the external barriers that undermine people's efforts to achieve this vision, such as aggressive food marketing practices, misleading nutrition and health claims, and higher prices of healthy foods.

2 A large proportion of content under this section is taken from the forthcoming UNICEF publication *Shifting the Narrative Around Childhood Overweight and Obesity. A Playbook for Effective Advocacy.*

▶ Listen to young people and lift their voices in all communication. There is no stronger advocate for change than young people with lived experience. When creating space for the youth voice, work behind the scenes to create the right space for them to communicate in:

- Speak to journalists ahead of time so they will ask the right questions;
- Spend time with event organisers on shaping the panels discussions;
- Build trusted relationships with civil servants and special advisors to government to empower them with the narrative.

2 ## Avoid perpetuating stigma

A lot of stigma surrounds overweight and obesity, and many communication materials depict people living with overweight and obesity in a demeaning manner. Affected persons and their families suffer from blame and bullying. Any advocacy and communications efforts must ensure they do not perpetuate the stigma by using harmful language or images:

▶ Avoid demeaning visuals such as children with obesity eating junk food, looking depressed, or only showing their torso. Instead, use visuals that show them living a cheerful, active life like everyone else,[3] and focus on children's unhealthy environments such as visuals of unhealthy retail settings or children surrounded by marketing.

▶ Avoid using language that puts blame on parents, children or adolescents and their choices. Instead, focus on their options and on the policies and interventions needed to address the underlying drivers of childhood overweight and obesity.

▶ Avoid using the word overweight and obesity as much as possible.[4] Consider carefully if using these terms is useful and appropriate in your context (e.g., to raise awareness on the issue) or if it might be more impactful to shift the focus on the food environment and children's right to healthy food. If you do use these terms, use person-first language, which means describing the person before the condition. For example, use 'children living with overweight' instead of 'overweight children'. If you would like to speak about health outcomes in a campaign, you might want to use the terms "diet-related illness" or "diet-related chronic disease" rather than overweight and obesity.

3 ## 10 guiding principles for shaping UNICEF's voice and framing the messaging

1. **Externalize** the problem by focusing on the external barriers people face.

2. **Use values** (not facts), frame issues around altruistic values like honesty, equality and justice.

3. **Highlight how everyone benefits:** solutions should always provide people with more or better options, rather than banning or reducing, which limits choices.

4. **Lead with children's health** and how we can improve it.

5. **Appeal to a sense of fairness** – the desire to meet all children's needs and protect their rights, no matter where they live.

6. **Frame unhealthy junk food** as full of cheap ingredients intended to boost profits at the expense of children's health.

7. **Emphasize that positive change** is not only needed but is possible.

8. **Bring messages to life** with real world child centred stories.

9. **Avoid the term 'obesity' as much as possible** while using less stigmatizing language such as "above a healthy weight".

10. **Harness the power of repetition** to change hearts and minds.

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The forthcoming UNICEF publication *Shifting the Narrative Around Childhood Overweight and Obesity. A Playbook for Effective Advocacy* contains guidance on how to frame key healthy food environment policies.

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3   The free image bank of World Obesity Federation provides non-biased and respectful photos of children and their families you can use for your advocacy and communications (ensure you credit World Obesity Federation for the photos).
4   For example, Bite Back 2030 have altogether stopped using these terms in their messaging and instead focus on the food environment.

3 What are challenges and opportunities when campaigning for healthy food environment policies?

Challenges	Opportunities
• In many countries, the public does not understand the role sugary drinks and junk food play in the rise of overweight and obesity and associated chronic diseases • The food and beverage industry positions itself as an economic player, creating employment which is claimed to be threatened by healthy food environment policies • The food and beverage industry also positions itself as a partner "for change," thus influencing the policy discourse and solutions that are considered • People placing blame on individuals/parents (weight stigma) rather than seeing it as a systemic problem • Junk science and front groups, mostly paid for by the food and beverage industry, questioning the effectiveness of healthy food environment policies • Nanny-state arguments (opposing health policies with the argument that government should not interfere with individuals' autonomy) • Current issues with hunger, inequity, and inflation make it tricky to speak about unhealthy diets, overweight and obesity • Positive cultural norms and attitudes towards overweight and obesity • Low confidence in government to effect change	• Obesity and diet-related diseases seen as a growing problem by policymakers and the public. This increased awareness can be harnessed not only to advocate for policy change, but also to educate the public (and policy-makers) on the drivers of the growing burden of obesity and diet-related diseases • Covid-19 underscored need to invest in health of populations and increased risks associated with obesity and diet-related non-communicable diseases • Public support for action on unhealthy diets, overweight and obesity is increasing, and the public recognizes governments need to be part of the solution • Economic impact of diet-related diseases and growing evidence around the (cost-)effectiveness of healthy food environment policies are a solid argument for action and can be persuasive to policymakers • Overweight and obesity can be framed as an equity and equality issue since evidence shows that overweight and obesity are unequally distributed, oftentimes along the lines of socioeconomic status, educational attainment, race/ethnicity, and gender • Evidence on unhealthy food environments showing that the food environment heavily influences consumer choice, and how the food industry strategically uses hyper palatable food formulations, marketing and pricing to sell their ultra-processed food products. This knowledge can be used for advocacy purposes to create concern about, or even outrage at, food indutry practices which can be harnessed to push for policy change • Governments have a human rights obligation to pass strong policies to regulate the food environment and protect consumers from harmful industry practices

4 What are policy advocacy and media advocacy?

Policy advocacy consists of efforts to educate and influence policy-makers to achieve a change in policy, such as the adoption of a public health law or regulation. Policy advocacy includes submitting answers to public consultations, face-to-face meetings with legislators and government officials of relevant ministries, participation in parliamentary debate, organising workshops or presentations in parliament, identifying, and supporting policy champions in parliament, and providing evidence and technical advice to relevant ministries. Media advocacy forms part of policy advocacy.

Media advocacy consists of strategically coordinated, targeted media and communications activities across owned, earned, and paid media platforms[5] (offline and digital) to support a policy advocacy campaign. Media advocacy creates a media environment favorable to support policy change by changing the narrative, keeping the issue in the public eye, and reaching key decisionmakers. The media advocacy strategy depends on the country context, which specific target audience(s) should be reached, what channels are most conducive to reaching the target audience(s), and what narratives need to be created to achieve the campaign objective.

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5   *Paid media* are media opportunities purchased through known media channels (e.g., advertisements, paid editorial in a magazine); *earned media* is coverage received as a result of communications and advocacy activities or through word of mouth (e.g., TV or newspaper coverage of activities, social media post of an opinion leader); *owned media* are internal communications channels fully controlled by an organisation (e.g., social media channels, newsletters or website of an organisation).

5 What are the elements of a successful policy advocacy campaign?

This section provides a brief summary of the main elements to consider when preparing an advocacy campaign in the space of unhealthy diets, overweight and obesity. For detailed guidance, consult UNICEF's Advocacy Toolkit. A guide to influencing decisions that improve children's lives, and the Global Health Advocacy Incubator's Advocacy Action Guide. A ToolKit for Strategic Policy Advocacy Campaigns.

1 **Evidence:** evidence on childhood overweight and obesity and the policy to be promoted should underpin and inform any advocacy strategy. Where national data is not available, it needs to be generated to drive advocacy and communications efforts (for example using UNICEF's Landscape Analysis Tool on Overweight and Obesity in Children and Adolescents). Evidence on the effectiveness of the promoted policy can consist of both modelled data and evaluations of implemented policies in other countries. Evidence can be shared with advocacy partners to support their campaigns and reach a wider audience.

2 **Political mapping:** provides an understanding of important decision-makers, opponents, and the policy process. The mapping should include: the necessary policy steps and procedural requirements to get the proposed policy adopted, implemented and enforced; decision-makers who may impact the success or failure of the proposed policy, their interests, concerns and stance on the policy; opponents and their reasons for opposition, messages, tactics and relationships to important decision-makers; and persons who can influence decision-makers, such as government officials or NGO representatives. The political mapping is a living document that should be kept up to date to reflect shifts in decision-makers' and opponents' position on the proposed policy and changes to their arguments.

3 **Advocacy strategy:** serves as the basis of all communications and advocacy activities and is informed by the policy objectives, evidence and political mapping. The strategy defines the target audience and persons, the narratives, channels, strategies and tactics (direct advocacy, media advocacy, grassroots mobilization), campaign phases, resources, and indicators to measure the success of communications and advocacy efforts.

> ► *Policy objectives:* the objectives should be SMART – Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound – and linked to the pursued policy change. The policy objectives should include the targeted policy-makers, the action or decision you want them to take, and a timeline within which you would like these actions or decisions to be taken.

> ► *Non-negotiable policy components:* throughout the advocacy campaign and during policy development, compromise is necessary to move toward policy change. However, it is important to know what the limits of compromise are: which policy components are non-negotiable? For example, when advocating for front-of-pack nutrition labeling (FOPNL), insisting on a government-developed, evidence-based nutrient profile model to implement the FOPNL rather than a scheme developed by industry.

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4   **Internal engagement:** childhood overweight and obesity is a complex topic involving multiple drivers and systems. Therefore, it is helpful to include members with different expertise in the advocacy effort (e.g., nutrition, health, communications, private sector engagement, social protection).

5   **External engagement:** create strategic alliances, strong partnerships and networks with partners from UN organisations, academia and civil society (e.g., consumer groups, parent associations, health or education NGOs, professional groups) and mobilise allies. Many opportunities exist for collaboration between UNICEF and civil society, such as joint submissions to government; fostering policy champions in parliament together so that legislators hear directly from UNICEF; joint research to generate evidence; helping each other reach new audiences, including sub-national groups; joint communications on the issue of childhood overweight and obesity, the triple burden of malnutrition and the need for policy solutions; and help each other call out conflicts of interest.

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UNICEF Argentina: *Promotion of healthy eating through comprehensive legislation- Developing and implementation of an inter-agency strategy with a regional body (UNICEF – PAHO – FAO) to influence government policies through in-person and virtual symposiums to share regional experiences and best practices (2017-2021).*

6   **Monitoring and evaluation:** the most obvious outcome to measure the effectiveness of a policy campaign is reaching the policy goal (e.g., adoption of a sugary drinks tax). However, policy change takes a long time, and interim measures can be used to inform a policy campaign's progress at contributing to the policy goal (e.g., the number of strategic meetings with legislators, or the number of effective media campaigns).

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UNICEF Argentina: *Promotion of healthy eating through comprehensive legislation- the "Promotion of Healthy Feeding" law was approved October 26th, 2021. The law enforced mandatory implementation of warning labelling (based on the best evidence-based standards) as well as regulations on marketing and school enviornments.*

6 What are elements of a successful media advocacy campaign?

This section provides a brief summary of the main elements to consider when preparing a media advocacy campaign. For detailed guidance, consult the Global Health Advocacy Incubator's Public Health Media Advocacy. Action Guide Elements Of A Media Advocacy Campaign.

① **Media advocacy action plan:** underpins all media advocacy work and should be aligned with the policy advocacy strategy and the policy goal(s). The action plan contains the media advocacy activities, the target audience and channels, which messenger(s) are appropriate, timelines, responsibilities and resources needed.

▶ *Communications objectives:* the communications objectives should help achieve the policy goal(s) and advance the overall advocacy strategy.

▶ *Target audience:* the political mapping conducted in preparation of the policy advocacy campaign provides the necessary information to select the target audience that the media campaign aims to reach.

▶ *Media mapping:* helps understand the media landscape and channels that can be used to reach the key audience. Depending on the campaign, this is done on a national, regional and/or local level. The media mapping contains information on each channel, its profile and audience, informing which channel(s) to use for each activity and target audience in the media campaign. It should include both offline and digital channels. Based on the media mapping, the appropriate media channels can be selected to reach the target audience.

▶ *Key messages:* convincing messages need to be developed for each target audience group. Messaging should avoid perpetuating stigma and follow the 10 guiding principles for effective framing (see above). Messages need to answer the following questions:

  • *What is the problem?*
  • *Why does it matter? Why is a policy solution necessary? Why should it matter to the target audience?*
  • *What should be done? (By) when?*

*UNICEF Argentina: #OjosCerrados campaign to warn about blind purchases without front-of-pack labeling. The campaign used "blind purchases" to describe consumers' lack of understanding of the nutritional content of ultraprocessed foods for lack of adequate food labeling (easy to understand front-of-pack labeling).*

▶ **Messengers:** they are the people that deliver the message to the target audience. Different messengers might be used alone or together for different audiences. They need to be known and trusted by the target audience, have insight into the issue, are linked to the affected groups, and can refrain from straying off topic. Messengers can take many forms, e.g., celebrities, influencers, a senior figure in a relevant organisation, or a person with lived experience. Ensure that messengers don't have conflicting engagements elsewhere, e.g., collaborations with companies that sell unhealthy foods or beverages.

Bite Back. Young people are the best messengers. Teenagers aged 14- 18 years old from all of United Kingdom are recruited, empowered, supported and convened to advocate on the issue of children's health and childhood obesity.

▶ **Media advocacy tactics:** strategically select the activities that will reach your target audience and have maximal impact across paid, earned, and owned media. Activities may be offline and digital.

2 **Media contact registry:** create and maintain an up-to-date media contact registry to engage with journalists covering the topics of your policy goals. The registry should include not only the journalists' contact details, but also their views on the topic.

3 **Monitoring and evaluation:** the impact and reach of the activities should be monitored and evaluated. Media monitoring looks at the reach of activities (e.g., number of earned media coverage as a result of a press release, number of impressions on Twitter) and how the issue is talked about in the media (e.g., framing of the issue by the media; number of newspaper articles reporting in favour of or against policy change). The monitoring results have to be evaluated to understand if the right target audience is reached and if the key messages and narrative is taken up. M&E should be ongoing, and results considered to adjust the media advocacy activities as needed.
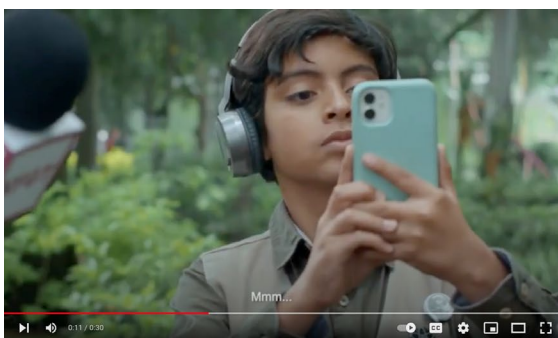
UNICEF Mexico. El nuevo etiquetado en México con Tona y Lu

7 Are investors a relevant advocacy target?

Much of the money owned by individuals and institutions is managed by asset managers who invest the money in financial instruments such as stocks, shares and funds listed on the public market (public equity) or debt (bonds). Collectively, these individuals and institutions own the companies they're invested in.

Global assets under management from institutional and individual investors crossed the $100 trillion mark in 2020. This number shows the enormous influence investors could have on business practices of the companies whose shares they own. This influence can be used to promote ethical business principles that respect child rights, create healthier societies, and reduce health inequalities.

Investors increasingly use environmental, social and governance (ESG) criteria to assess corporate sustainability and risk across their portfolios. ESG funds have risen to 40% of global assets under management. Social impact investing focuses on company practices which impact issues such as human rights, health and safety, consumer health, equality and diversity, responsible marketing, and fair pricing. A notable initiative is the Access to Nutrition Initiative (ATNI) which seeks to influence the private sector's performance on healthy, affordable diets. ATNI assesses and ranks the world's largest manufacturers on their nutrition-related commitments, practices, and performance globally. Many asset managers use ATNI's indices to influence their investment decisions.

The goal of investor advocacy is to increase disclosure of business practices, influence corporate strategy and actions, and achieve the advocacy targets. Investor advocacy includes a variety of activities such as

▶ Collaborations between and coalitions of investors

▶ Corporate engagement:

- Investor letters: signed by investors, they are directed to target companies' board members and make specific asks based on the data available. Letters can also be sent from asset owners to asset managers to encourage them to become active or engage in existing initiatives.

- Investor meetings: dialogue between investors and target companies

- Questions at annual general meetings (AGMs): the aim is to raise questions at company board level and are useful in helping to secure meetings with a company.

- AGM resolutions: a group of shareholders files a motion to be voted on at a company's AGM. AGM resolutions are used sparingly in cases where companies have failed to respond to other engagement methods.

> ● **The goal of investor advocacy is to increase disclosure of business practices, influence corporate strategy and actions, and achieve the advocacy targets. The benefit of investor advocacy is that it can drive transformation of company practices towards more ethical, sustainable practices that respect and promote human rights, health and safety, consumer health, and equality and diversity. However, policy advocacy for government-led, mandatory healthy food environment policies remains important alongside investor advocacy due to the limitations of shareholder action: corporate policies might not be in line with solutions proposed by public health advocates, companies might not adhere to their policies, monitoring of commitments and of adherence to policies can be difficult, and there are levers outside of shareholder action to enforce company policies.**

Resources

1 **Advocacy resources**

- UNICEF: Shifting the Narrative Around Childhood Overweight and Obesity. A Playbook for Effective Advocacy (forthcoming). Prevention of Overweight and Obesity in Children and Adolescents, Advocacy Strategy and Guidance (2020). Prevention of Overweight and Obesity in Children and Adolescents, Programming Guidance (2019). UNICEF Advocacy Packages for Food Environment Policies, including advocacy cartoons and videos. Advocacy Toolkit. A guide to influencing decisions that improve children's lives (2010).
- GHAI: Advocacy Action Guide. A ToolKit for Strategic Policy Advocacy Campaigns (2019). Public Health Media Advocacy. Action Guide Elements Of A Media Advocacy Campaign (2021). Advocacy tools on campaign planning, political mapping, media advocacy, campaign risk assessment, implementation planning, and monitoring & evaluation (register to get free access to the tools)
- World Obesity Federation: free image bank

2 **Investor advocacy**

- Share Action: website and The road towards healthier markets: two years on – Impact Report (2021)

3 **Campaign and country examples**

- Bite Back 2030: campaigns website, Mascots Anonymous (advocacy video about food marketing), Introducing Müd (advocacy video on misleading health and nutrition claims)
- Argentina:
    - Ojos cerrados campaign: website and video
    - National Coalition to Prevent Childhood Obesity (a network of civil society organizations, supported by UNICEF, whose mission is to promote healthy food environment policies)
- China: #KnowYourFood campaign to empower children and young people to make healthier food choices
- Mexico: The Mexican Soda Tax: How to Win a Campaign. Presentation by El Poder del Consumidor, 8th EPHA Annual Conference, Brussels, 2017.