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# Activists: Don't join SUN, a nutrition drive

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Civil society groups have cautioned the central government about fresh efforts to persuade India to join the international movement called Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN), whose stated mission is to help countries fight malnutrition.

Several paediatricians, nutritionists and public health activists wrote to the Niti Aayog stating that SUN, "while claiming to support governments in taking the lead in policy setting, in reality, facilitated the entry of businesses into the policy space". Even as SUN's efforts to persuade India to join it have not been very successful, Maharashtra joined the movement in 2014 and Uttar Pradesh and Jharkhand in 2016. SUN coordinator Gera Verburg of Netherlands is expected to meet Niti Aayog officials this week.

Many countries that did not join the SUN network have raised the issue of conflict of interest in the SUN Business Network (SBN), which includes multinational food corporations like Pepsi, Cargill, Nutriset, Britannia, Unilever, Edesia, General Mills, Glaxo SKB, Mars, Indofood, Nutrifood, DSM and Valid Nutrition. In a document detailing the reasons for not joining networks like SUN, officials from a Brazilian government agency said that international initiatives on fighting malnutrition ought to forbid "the participation of the business sector in the decision-making process and the management and implementation of both international and national strategies and policies".

They pointed out that "such participation creates conflicts of interests and favours market-guided measures that ultimately result in the increase of food insecurity," and added that it goes against the concept of food sovereignty. Of the 58 countries in the SUN network, over 40 are from Africa. Though SUN -- started in 2010 -- claims to be a global movement, it has only aided

recipient countries. The letter to Niti Aayog stated: "We cannot see how the Government of India - or any other government claiming to uphold democratic principles - can allow themselves to be accountable to transnational corporations or philanthropic foundations rather than their citizens. Nor can we see how effective nutrition and public health policies can be adopted if consensus must first be reached with transnational food corporations."

The SUN approach, the letter argued, results in members sidelining sustainable strategies for prevention of malnutrition that NGOs focus on and instead promotes ready to use foods as a solution. Activists warned the agenda was to get India to sign up as it would add to SUN's profile to get India into its network, but this would bring little for India while facilitating business for multinational food corporations selling processed foods, especially those with high sugar, salt and fat content. Research in India has shown that commercially produced fortified, energy-dense food is not effective in treating children suffering from severe acute malnutrition.