

Report Finds Significant Industry Affiliation in IGWG ‘NGO’ Comments

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Intellectual Property Watch

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As negotiators gather at the United Nations this week in Geneva to seek ways to boost innovation on neglected diseases disproportionately affecting poor people, a new study was released showing that commentators at the negotiation’s public hearing came primarily from organisations affiliated in some way with the pharmaceutical or biotechnology industries.

The study, released on 7 November, was conducted by US non-governmental group Essential Action via survey. Commentators registered as an ‘NGO’, ‘Civil Society Group’, or ‘International Organization’ and were asked whether their group accepts donations from for-profit corporations or trade associations, and then asked for details regarding specific companies, amounts donated, and stated purpose of donations. Essential Action also independently researched funding sources and affiliations of commentators who did not respond to the survey.

The results of [the study](#) were released during the World Health Organization Intergovernmental Working Group on Public Health, Innovation and Intellectual Property (IGWG), which is meeting from 5 to 10 November.

Overall in the study, Essential Action found twenty-two of the comments submitted by NGO/Civil Society groups were from organisations that had either received money from pharmaceutical corporations or had representatives from the industry on their board of directors. The level of involvement ranged from fairly minimal – the Colorado Chapter of the National Association of Hispanic Nurses, for instance, had accepted funding for its 2007 conference from several pharmaceutical and biotechnology firms -to fairly in-depth – the Alliance for Health Education and Development, for instance is headed by a former health care industry lobbyist. An additional thirteen trade associations with overt ties to the pharmaceutical industry joined in the IGWG comments. Only eight organisations listed as NGOs showed no ties with industry, though there were also eight academics with no apparent industry ties who commented.

Reactions to Essential Action’s survey were also mixed. Essential Action suggested that ties to industry are a helpful way to assess the value of comments from contributors: clearly those with a strong financial stake in the IGWG outcome are more subject to bias.

Among survey respondents who said they did not accept donations from for-profit corporations, there was some agreement with EA’s position. Thomas Pogge from Incentives for Global Health noted that it “was clear from many... contributions” that industry donations were being accepted and thanked Essential Action for its record-keeping. **There was also disagreement, notably from Lawrence Kogan from the Institute for Trade, Standards and Sustainable Development, which advocates strong intellectual property regimes, felt that “to the extent there are corporate monies donated to support our efforts, all the better.”**

Others admitted accepting for-profit monies but did not believe it affected their ability to deliver honest, qualified opinions. Virginia T. Ladd of the American Autoimmune Related Diseases Association noted that

it “is standard practice in the USA [to] receive corporate and foundation funds from those entities [with] an interest in the work.”

Robert Weissman of Essential Action said in a statement: “Understanding an organisation’s ties is helpful in assessing the merits of comments submitted.”

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