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Health Research Center**

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Behavioral Sciences Hijacked: *How it's abused and misused in the commercial determinants of health*

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What are commercial determinants of Health (CDoH)?

- CDoH are the **private sector activities impacting public health**, either positively or negatively, and the enabling **political economic systems and norms**.

(WHO,2023)

- CDoH: **the systems, practices, and pathways** through which commercial actors drive health and equity.'

Lancet, Gilmore et al 2023



Image credit: Mar Nieto, from Collin J; Ralston R; Hill SE, Westerman L (2020) Signalling Virtue, Promoting Harm: Unhealthy commodity industries and COVID-19. NCD Alliance, SPECTRUM

What are commercial determinants of Health (CDoH)?

Arms industry as a commercial determinant of health



thebmj

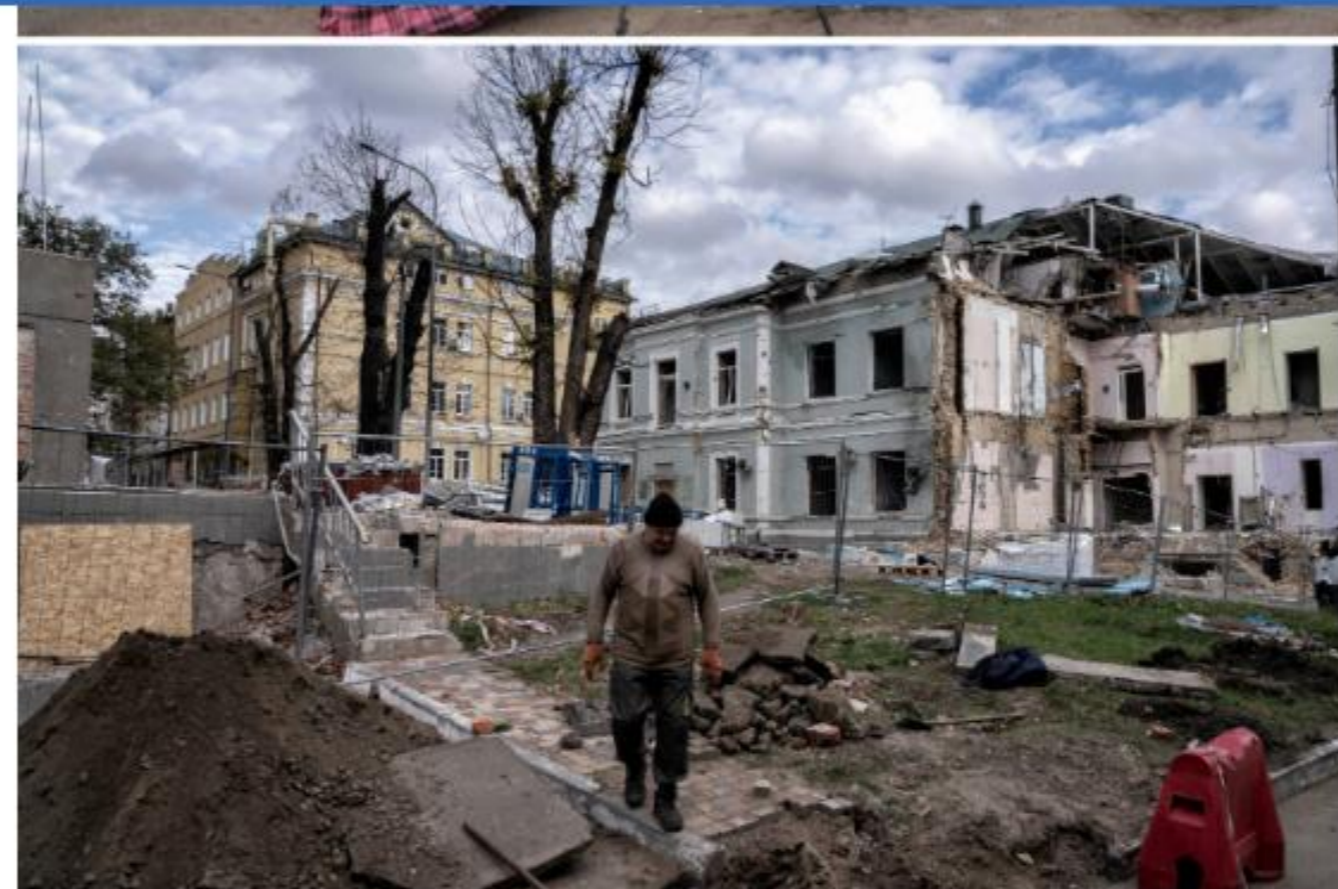
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Why addressing the CDoH?

NCDs continue to kill around



41 MILLION PEOPLE
every year, accounting for over
70% of all DEATHS WORLDWIDE
and causing half of all global
disability



The deaths from NCDs are
projected to escalate to



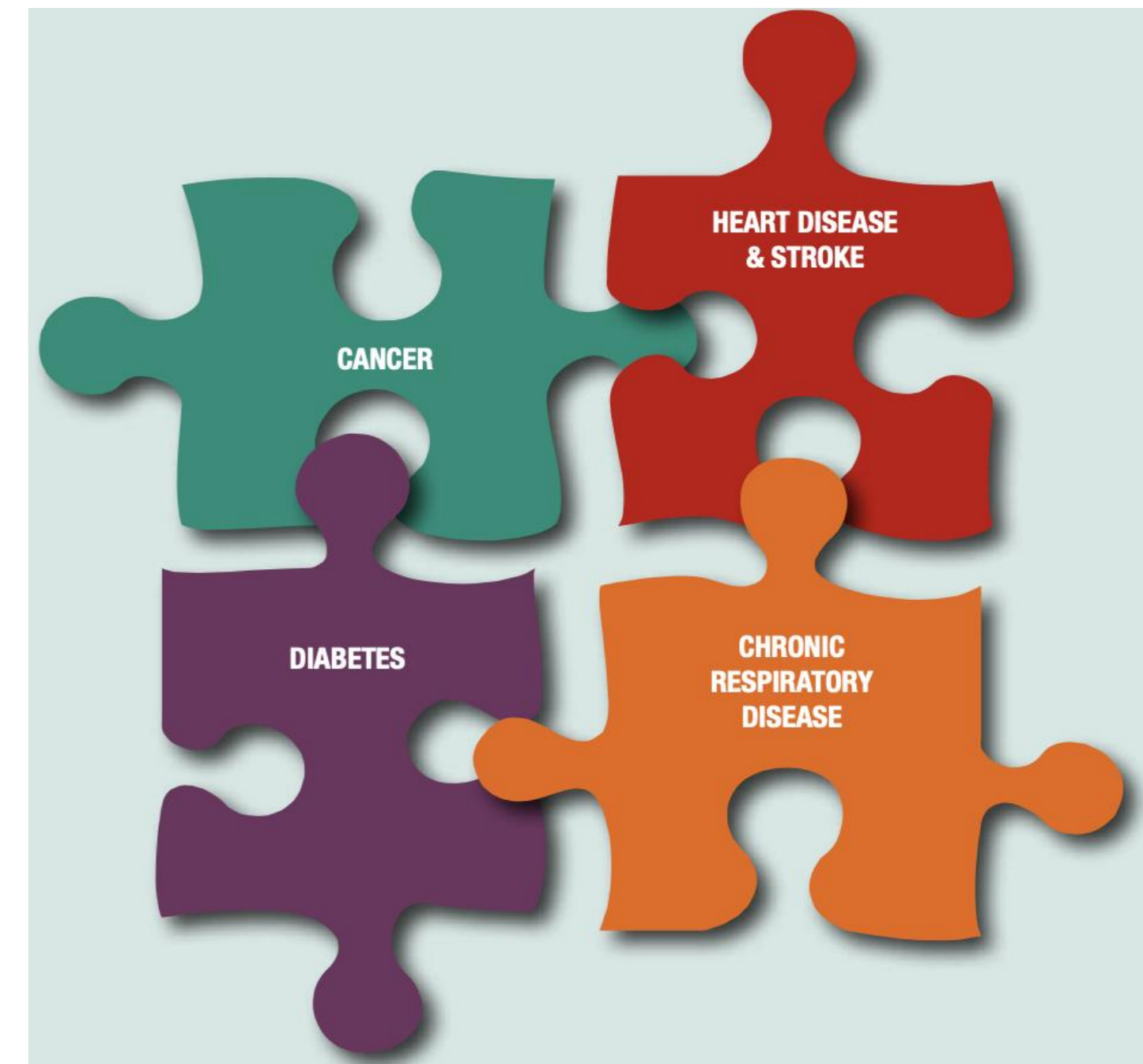
52 MILLION
75% of ALL DEATHS



in **2030**

GBD, 2015

*Premature NCD deaths (death from an NCD before age 70 years)



Account for over 80% of
all premature NCD
deaths

Why addressing...

Almost 2/3 of NCDs deaths are linked to



tobacco use, harmful use of alcohol, unhealthy diets, physical inactivity and air pollution

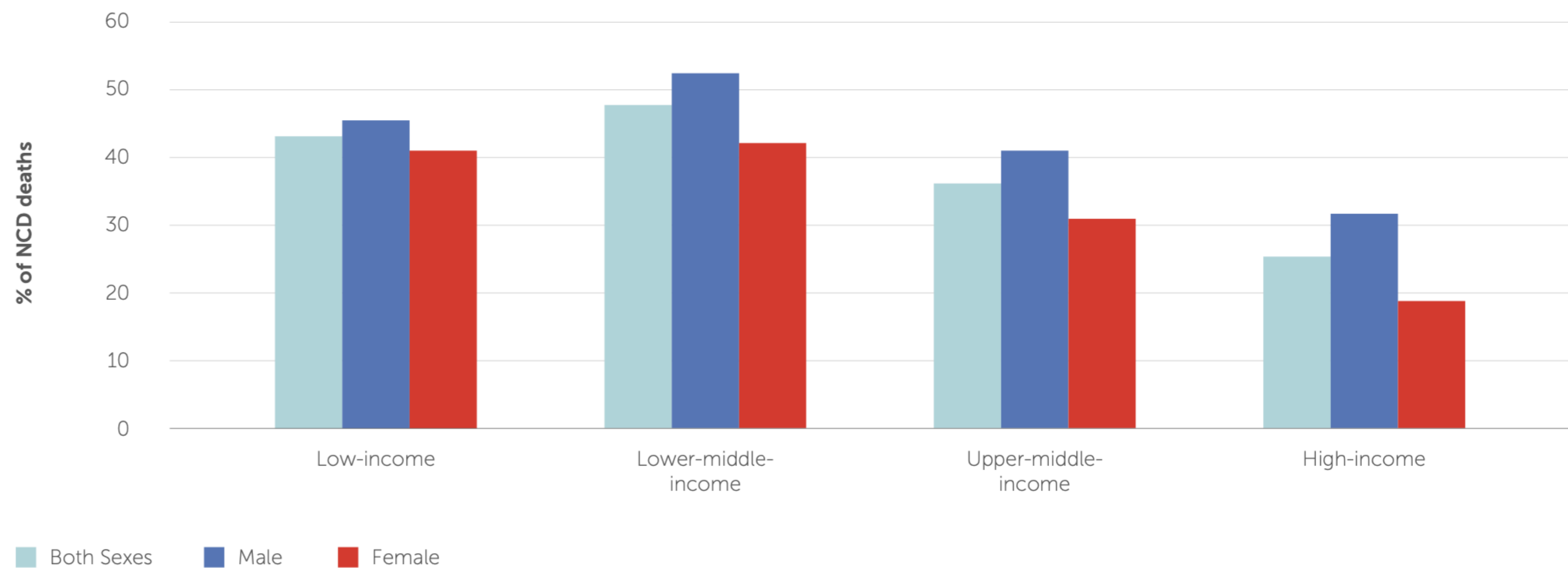


Image from the NCD Alliance <https://ncdalliance.org/why-ncds>

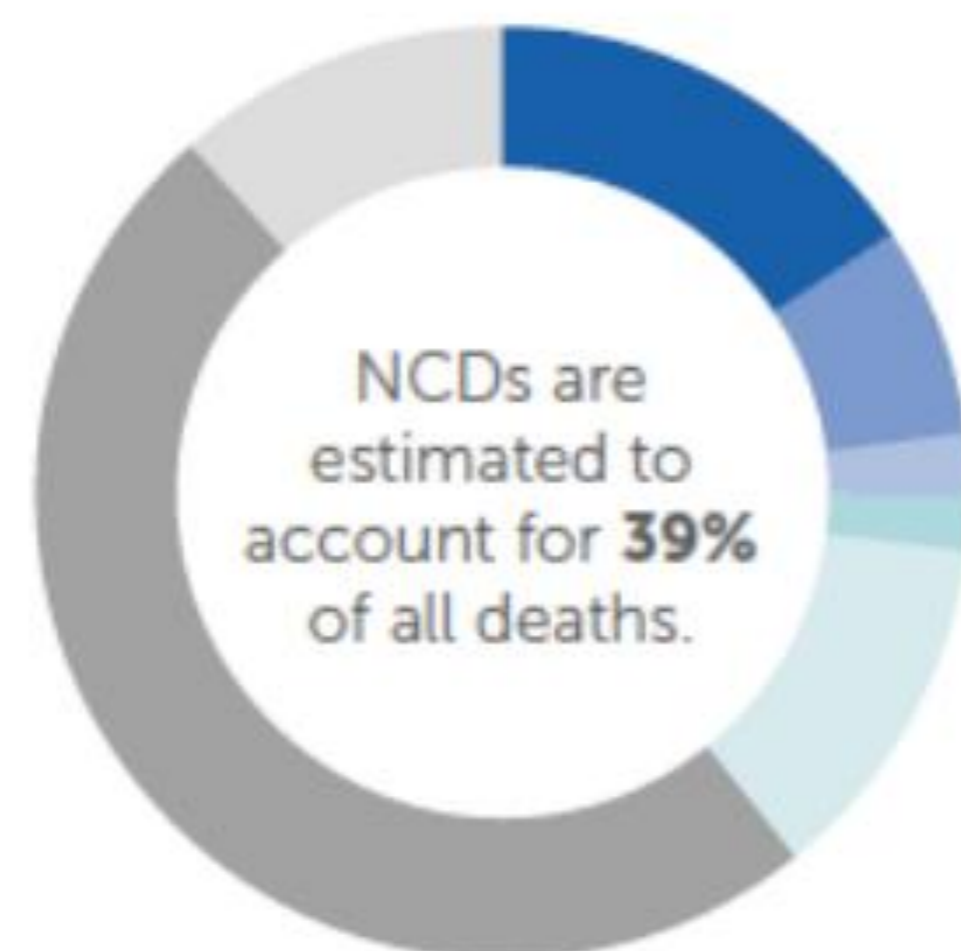
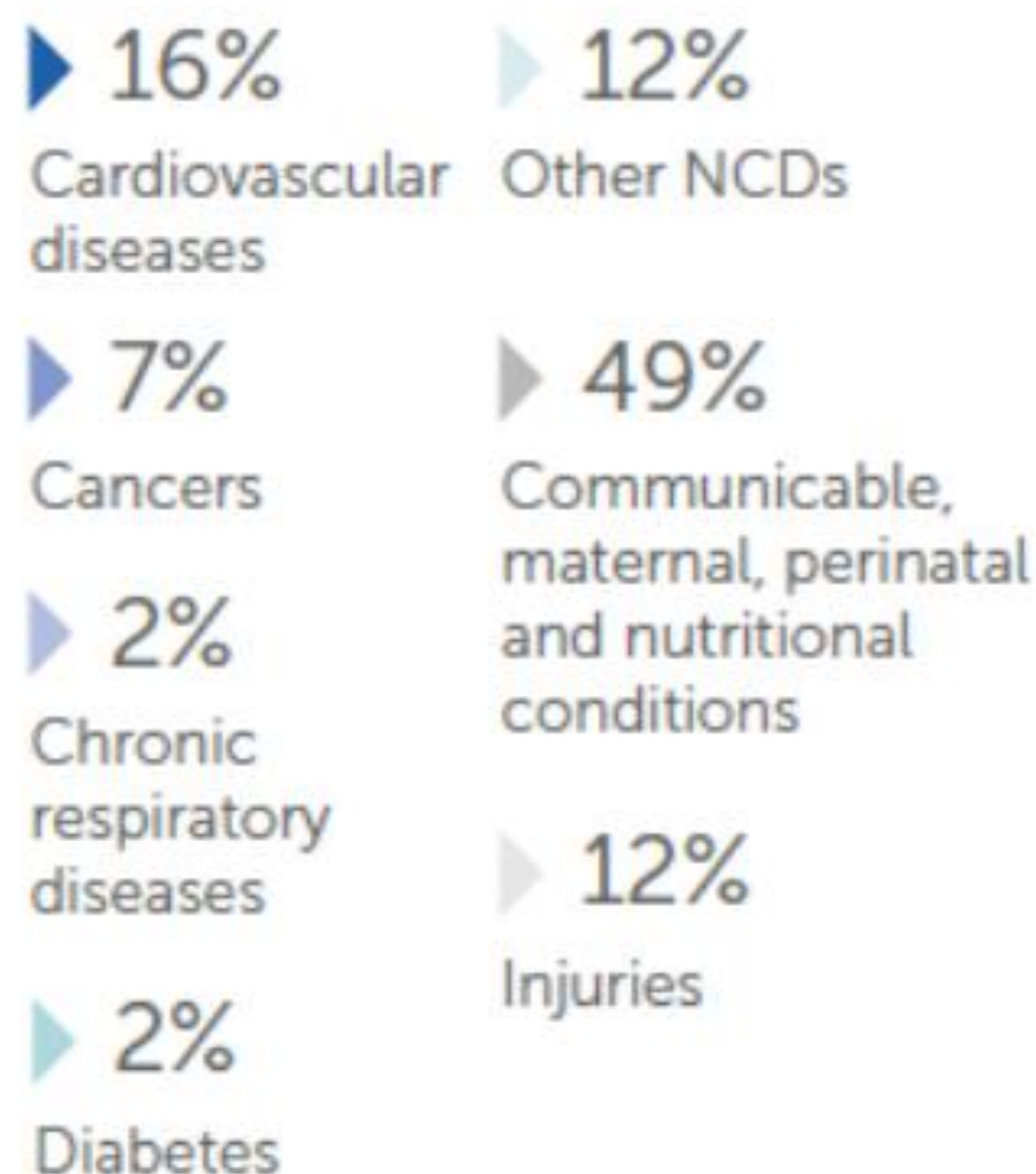
Who are most affected?

- Each year, more than **15 million** premature death
- **85%** of these "premature" deaths occur in LMICs
- **77%** of all NCD deaths are in LMICs

FIGURE 2: PROPORTION OF NCD DEATHS OCCURRING AMONG THOSE AGED 30 - 69 YEARS, BY INCOME GROUP, 2016



NCD burden in Ethiopia



- The 2019 GBD data indicated that in Ethiopia,
- Overall, NCD prevalence accounted for **63.2% of total cases in Addis Ababa**, **59.8% in Harari**, and **55% in Somali** regional states
- From 2010 to 2019, the incidence cases of NCDs increased by 25% (24-26%), death counts by 21% (8-35%), and DALYs by 17% (6-29%)

Source: National strategic plan for the prevention and control of major non-communicable diseases

Estimated contribution of the CDoH globally



At least one third and probably more than 58% of all deaths globally



At least 41% and probably more than 78% of deaths from NCDs

Unhealthy approaches of CDoH

1. Coloniality approach and theories to promote their products in LMICs

- Political control and governance
- Economic exploitation
- Cultural domination
- Psychological manipulation
- Legacy of colonialism

- Example, tobacco production in Malawi
(Colonial, National, liberalization and accelerated globalization)



Smith and Lee, 2018

‘... The life of our economy...’

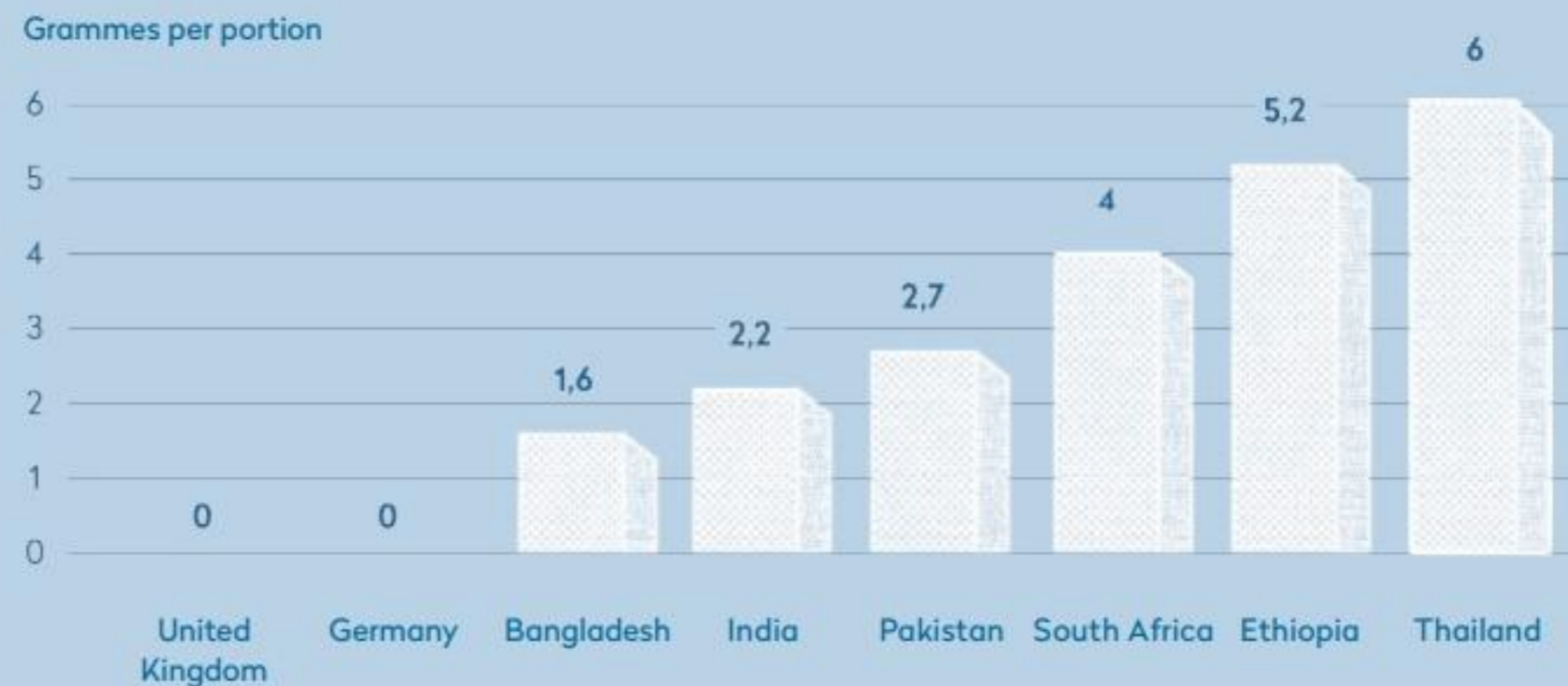
Former President Peter Mutharika to describe leaf growing (African News 2016)

Unhealthy approaches of CDoH

SAME PRODUCT, DIFFERENT MARKETS: OBVIOUS DOUBLE STANDARD

Wheat-based infant cereals with milk are Nestlé's founding product. Today, Cerelac is sold all over the world, although its composition varies considerably from country to country.

Added sugar content of the same Cerelac wheat product in different countries



Source: Public Eye and IBFAN (2024). Analysis of the nutritional information appearing on the products, or, when the added sugar content is not declared, results of laboratory analyses.

Unhealthy approaches of CDoH

INTERNATIONAL REVIEW OF SOCIOLOGY—REVUE INTERNATIONALE DE SOCIOLOGIE
2024, VOL. 34, NO. 3, 433–450
<https://doi.org/10.1080/03906701.2024.2383634>



RESEARCH ARTICLE

OPEN ACCESS

Tapping imaginaries: Guinness, masculinity, and the promise of Africa Rising

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a Example of branded bottle and glass next to football match images

ABSTRACT

This article interrogates masculinity and the consumer politics of late capitalism in urban Africa. Engaging scholarship on racialized masculinities, branding, and African cities with special attention to the Nigerian context, it conducts a media analysis of three Guinness Africa advertising campaigns: Made of More, Michael Power, and Greatness. Building off of its centuries-long ties between the African male consumer and European capital, in 1998 Guinness created the fictional Michael Power in a marketing coup that was to elevate the brewery to unrivaled dominance over the continent's beer import market. Subsequent campaigns were to glorify everyday heroes: Greatness declaring a 'drop of greatness in each man' and Made of More extolling the sartorial elegance of Congolese dandies. This representational shift reflected the brewery's recognition of changing models of accumulation in the African urban informal economy and the corresponding aspirations that they ignited in its men. Bypassing scripts of hegemonic masculinity, this new era of Guinness advertising showcased self-made men in a laissez-faire economy, simultaneously celebrating and depoliticizing the racialized global inequalities and gendered politics of contemporary African urbanization. Guinness's successful appeal to twenty-first-century African male consumers provides a case study of multinational marketing in bottom billion capitalism.

ARTICLE HISTORY

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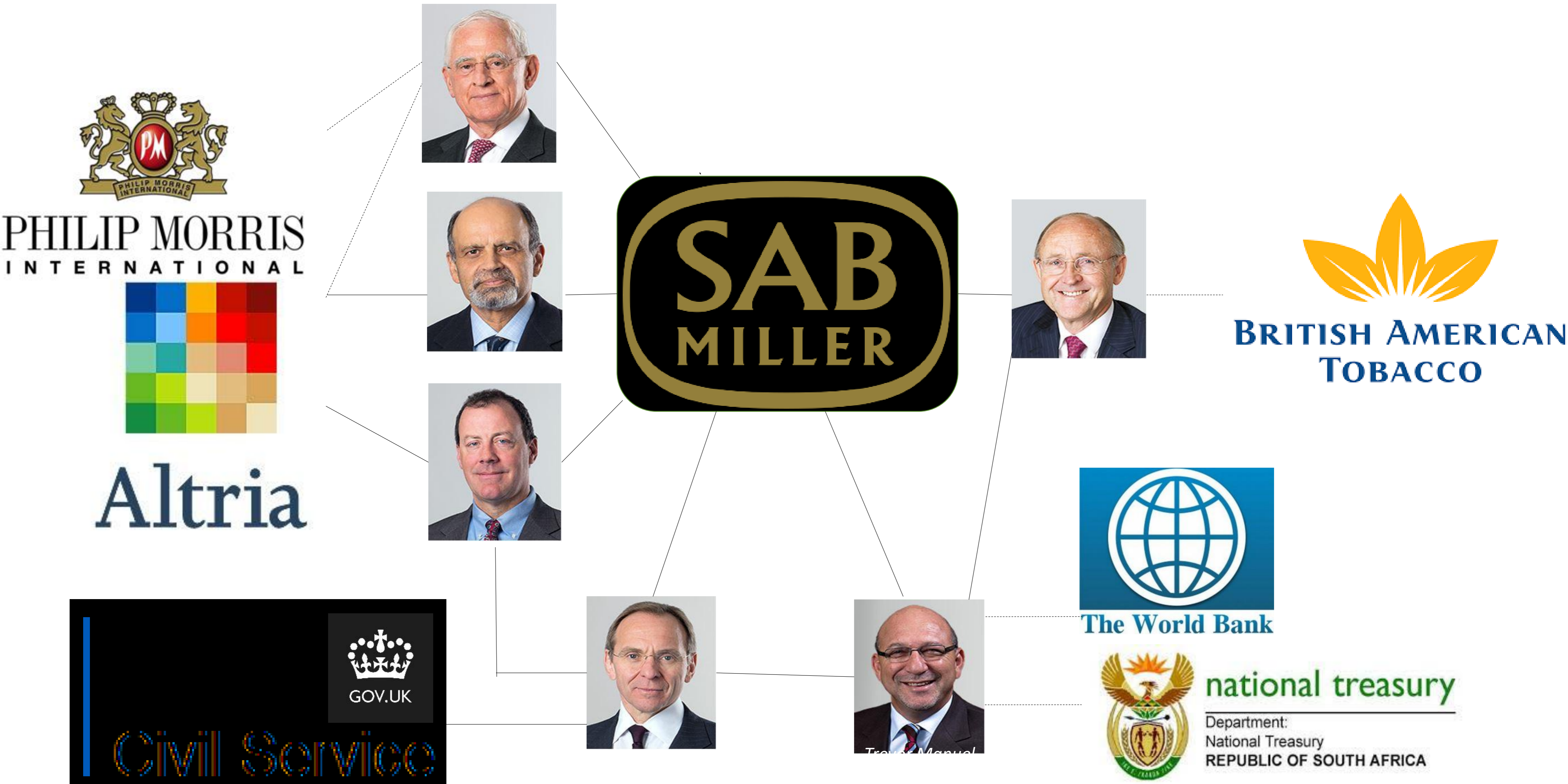
Africa Rising; Black masculinity; bottom billion capitalism; informal economy; racial capitalism

Unhealthy approaches of CDoH

2. Interlocking directorates... *Familiarity cognitive bias*

“An interlocking directorate occurs when a person affiliated with one organization sits on the board of directors of another organization. The causes and consequences of this seemingly minor, even innocuous event, have been the source of extensive debate since ... the early twentieth century. Relatively simple to identify in publicly available information from highly reliable sources, interlocks have become **the primary indicator of interfirm network ties.**” – Mizruchi, 1996

Interlocking directorates: Tobacco, alcohol & political elite



Interlocking directorates: Tobacco, alcohol & a prominent cancer charity



3. Good Governance and Conflict of interest... loss aversion



World Health Organization

Alarm as WHO accepts increasing amount of dark money from corporate donors

Experts say millions in corporate funding and concealment of donors' identities raises key conflict-of-interest concerns

Tom Perkins

Tue 9 Sep 2025 12.00 BST

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The World Health Organization's headquarters in Geneva. Photograph: Denis Balibouse/Reuters

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Police order world champ Terence Crawford out of car at gunpoint after hometown victory parade



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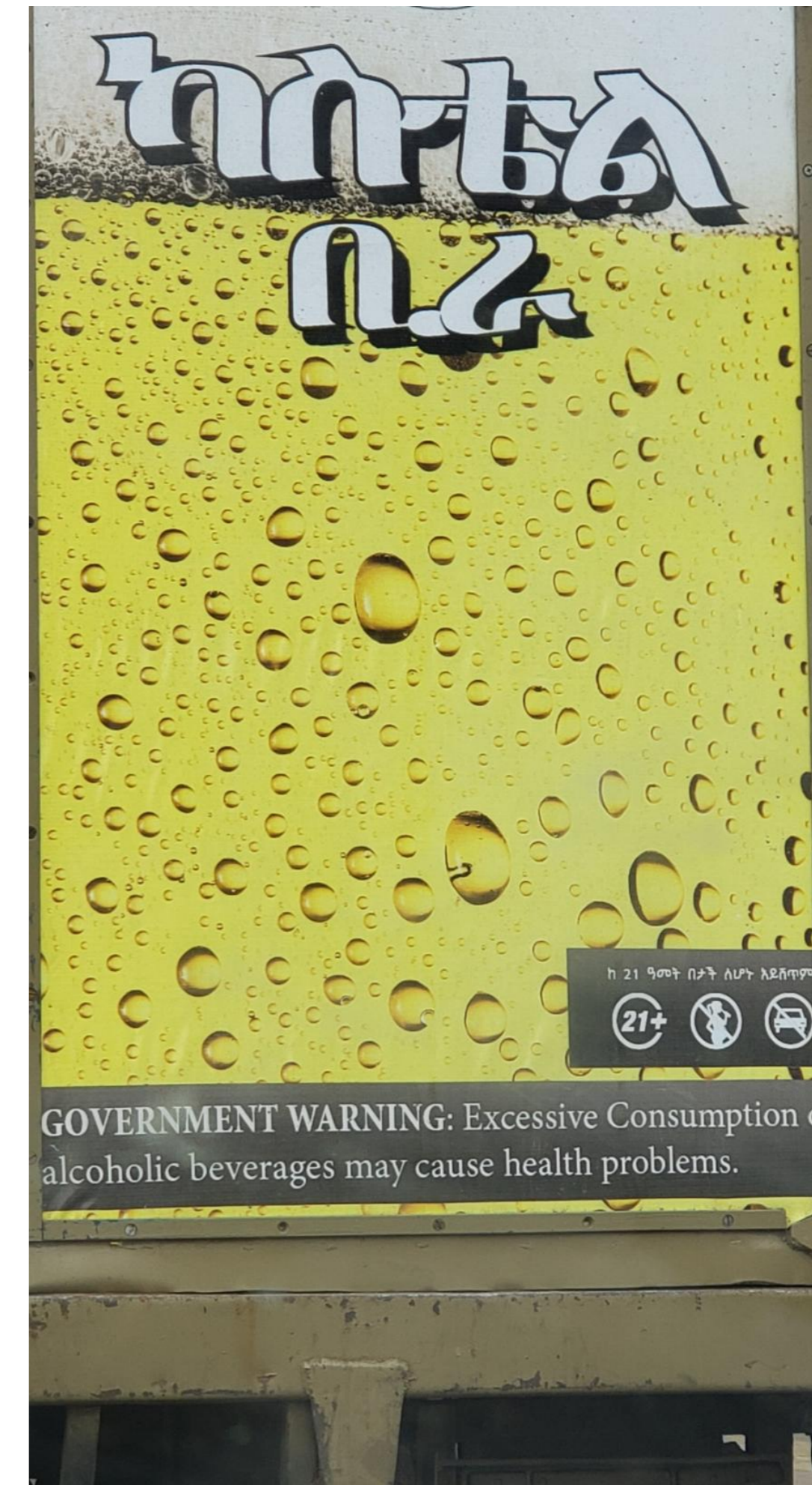
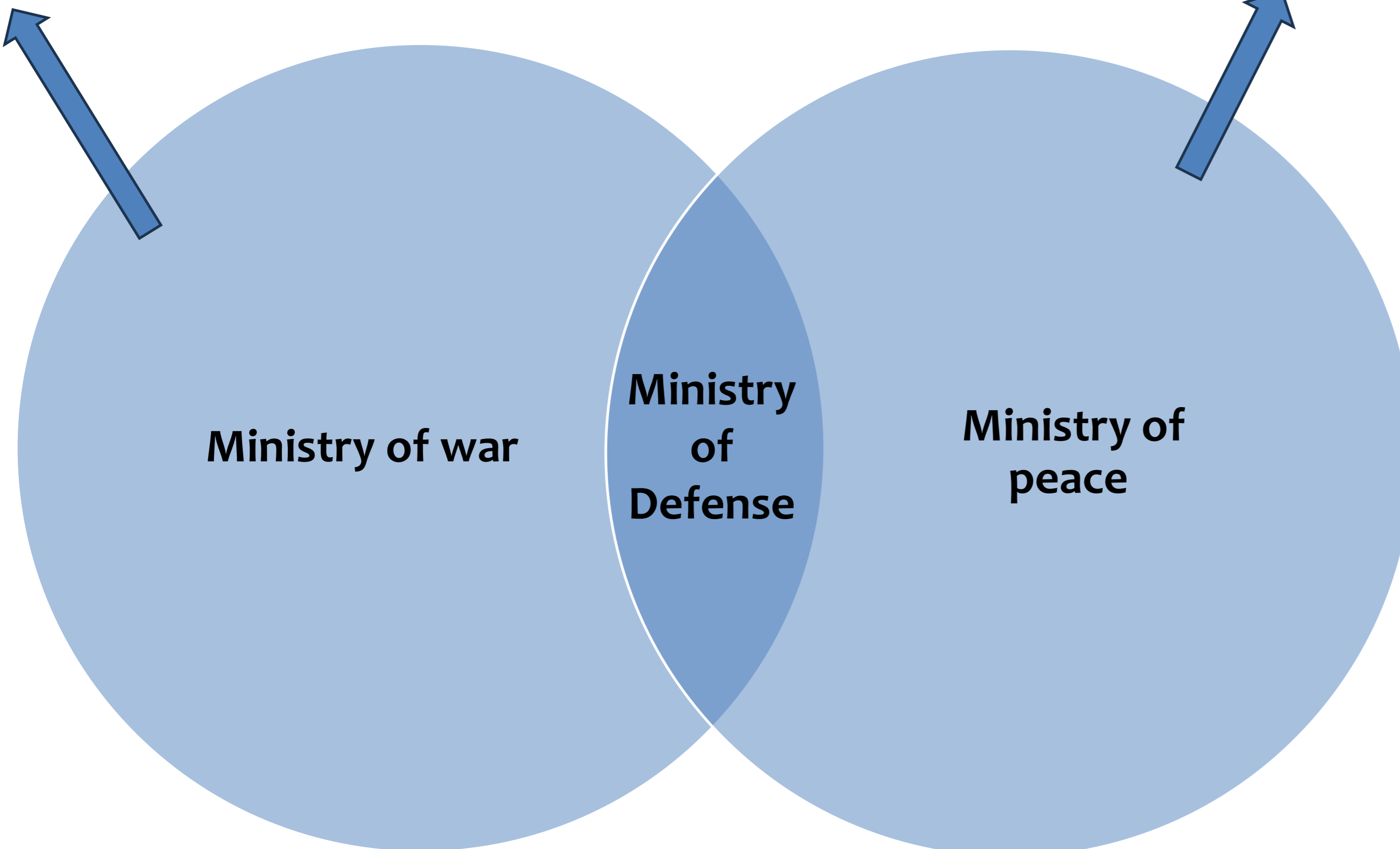
Trump and Netanyahu to Hamas: accept Gaza peace plan or face consequences

Unhealthy approaches...

3. The power of language... perception

Dysphemism

Euphemism



Unhealthy approaches...

4. Statistical literacy



Product 1: Chandel ice cream

Nutrition information per 100g

Energy (kJ/100g)	1266
Saturated fat (g/100g)	11.7
Total sugar (g/100g)	26.3
Salt (g/100g)	0.12g salt
Fruit, veg, nuts (%)	0
AOAC fibre (g/100g)	1.3
Protein (g/100g)	4.2

The industries also know that people mostly live in 'subjective probability' than 'objective probability'



Unhealthy approaches...

5. The Psychology of cost as a strategy (loss aversion) and message framing



Unhealthy approaches...

6. Corporate social responsibility and health wash as a marketing strategy



Unhealthy approaches...

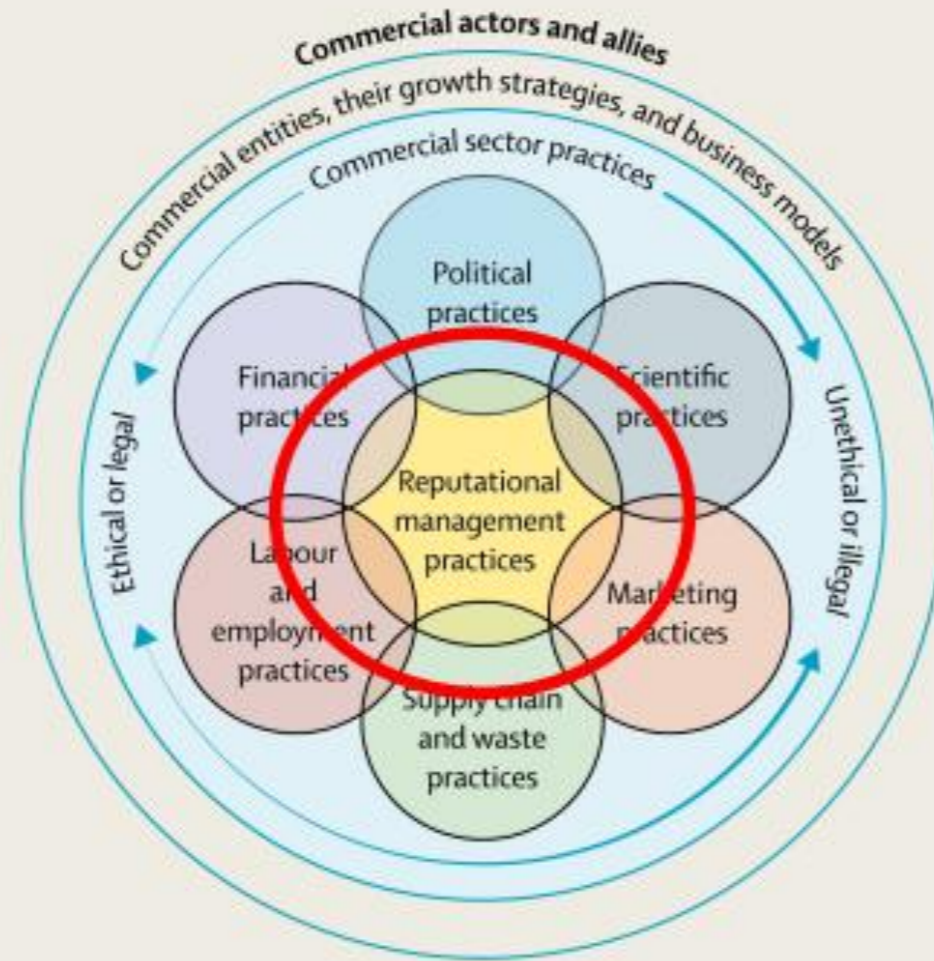


PepsiCo CEO, April 2010 interview
CNN Money:

"If all consumers exercised, did what they had to do, the problem of obesity wouldn't exist."

https://money.cnn.com/2010/04/27/news/companies/indra_noyi_pepsico.fortune/

Reputation management practices, eg CSR



- Distracts from harms
- Misdirects blame (to individuals)
- Misinform – eg AI harms
- Buy acceptability, access and influence
- Underpin and enable all other practices

ABInBev



Clive Betts MP
Chair
Housing, Communities & Local
Houses of Parliament
Westminster
London
SW1A 0AA

"Smokers who drop cigarette butts in the street will be made to watch video footage that shames them for harming the environment"

History: <https://tobaccotactics.org/wiki/csr-imperial-and-love-where-you-live/>

Original Scholarship

Dark Nudges and Sludge in Big Alcohol:
Behavioral Economics, Cognitive Biases, and
Alcohol Industry Corporate Social
Responsibility

MARK PETTICREW,* NASON MAANI,*†
LUISA PETTIGREW,* HARRY RUTTER,‡
and MAY CI VAN SCHALKWYK*

Found: "CSR" materials around "responsible drinking" produced by alcohol industry-funded organisations e.g. Drinkaware **encourage, rather than discourage alcohol use**

<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1111/1468-0009.12475>

Unhealthy approaches...

7. Access, simplicity, convenience, habit formation or craving and social norms as tools: Unfair ecosystem between the CDoH and health system

- Get addicted with salt, sugar, flavors, color, etc
- The industries play with biology, sociology, psychology, economics, political science, religion, linguistics, anthropology, physics, chemistry, etc
- Social media and digital revolution
- The health sector works in silo (the challenge seems only from health sector)



Unhealthy approaches...

8. Behavioral bundling (increased risk of multiple CDoH)



Unhealthy approaches...

9. The use of ‘fundamental attribution error’ and all other cognitive biases: the industry well understands how human mind and behavior works

Does Harvard make you smarter?... swimmer's body illusion



“In the factory we make cosmetics, in the store, we sell hope.”

Charles Revlon



ugh

Unhealthy approaches...

10. Attack on the credibility and trust of science and scientists

- Selectively funding research projects and individuals
- Withholding research findings
- Generating doubt and controversy about existing studies and evidence
- Silencing, marginalizing, and/or harassing opposing figures, including scientists
- Selectively emphasizing and framing research questions and results
- Developing public relations and lobbying campaigns to promote preferred messages

PepsiCo CEO, April 2010
interview CNN Money:

“If all consumers exercised, did what they had to do, the problem of obesity wouldn't exist.”

Strategies to tackle the CDoH?

Decolonization approach

1. Acknowledge and address colonial legacies
2. Shift power dynamics and promote equity
3. Center local priorities and expertise
4. Examine the global political economy
5. Promote respectful and collaborative interactions



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Strategies...

The “best buys”: To address the growing burden of NCDs, WHO identified a package of 16 “best buy” interventions that are cost-effective, affordable, feasible and scalable in all settings

Risk factor/ disease to be addressed	Intervention
Reduce Tobacco use	Tax
	Packaging
	Advertising, promotion and sponsorship
	Smoke-free public places
	Educate
Reduce harmful use of alcohol	Tax
	Advertising
	Availability

Reduce unhealthy diet	Reformulate food
	Supportive environments
	Educate
	Packaging
Reduce physical inactivity	Educate
Manage cardiovascular disease and diabetes	Drug therapy and counselling
Manage cancer	Vaccinate
	Screening

Strategies...

- Food nutrient labeling in Kenya
- Alcohol promotion ban in Ethiopia



Health Promotion approach

Lessons from Thai Health promotion foundation and the Australian health promotion foundation, VicHealth... **Earmarked budget for health promotion**

Legislative and regulatory measures, civil society advocacy, health literacy and accountability, and better corporate social responsibility



<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC6453312/pdf/BLT.18.220277.pdf>

Concluding remark

“... Public health cannot progress without action on the commercial determinants of health...”

*Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, WHO Director General,
(Lancet, 2023)*



Fighting the commercial determinants is “not anti-business; it is pro-health” approach

Lancet, Gilmore et al 2023



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