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Industry stakeholders must engage on food and drink advertising to children

The increased prevalence of childhood obesity in South Africa demands that thought be given to how the media and marketing industry can contribute to address the growing problem.

The Media Monitoring Project (MMP) is inviting media and marketing stakeholders to engage proactively in forming a policy task force to draft local recommendations on food and drink advertising to children.

“Governments and lobby groups around the world are discussing whether the regulation of food advertising to children is the next step in fighting the battle against childhood obesity,” says William Bird, executive director of the Media Monitoring Project. “It is time that representatives of the advertising and marketing industry come together to start finding South African solutions, before we get to a point where regulation seems to be the only option.

Consumer and health groups in the United Kingdom are calling for a ban on all fast food advertising aimed at children before the 21:00 watershed hour.

In September 2006 UK communications regulator, OFCOM, released research indicating that the majority of participants in the British survey felt regulation of food and drink advertising to children was necessary and that industry self regulation would not be sufficient.

Further findings included:

1. A complete ban on high fat, high salt and high sugar foods enjoyed very limited support;
2. A ban on high fat, high salt and high sugar foods to children younger than 5 years enjoyed universal support; and
3. Content regulation was called for spontaneously.

Advertising plays an important role in society and the economy. Children in terms of our constitution and all the legal provisions are afforded special protection. This protection does not exclude advertising and it means we have to take into consideration these rising changes,” says Bird.

Organisations and individuals interested in participating in the policy task force can contact the Media Monitoring Project on 011 788 1278 or mmpinfo@mediamonitoring.org.za.

The MMP is a human rights-driven non-governmental organisation, specialising in media monitoring with the goal of promoting the development of a free, fair, ethical and critical media culture in South Africa and the rest of the continent.