WN *Update*

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WN *Big Food Watch. World Health Organization*

An ominous diagnosis



Will Margaret Chan be the last director-general of WHO to speak truth to power? The most powerful member states and transnational corporations are determined to eviscerate UN agencies

Access September 2014 Update on creation of ECHO here
Access March 2015 ECHO interim report here
Access March 2015 People's Health Movement comments on ECHO here
Access May 2013 Global Health Watch on WHO reforms here

The Update team reports

The World Health Organization World Health Assembly (WHA) is held this month in Geneva between Monday-Tuesday 18-26 May. The two WHO initiatives described here will be discussed at the WHA in formal sessions, corridors and meeting rooms, and over meals. These are, in UN acronym-speak, FENSA and ECHO. One is the WHO 'Framework of Engagement with Non-State Actors', the other is 'The Commission for Ending Childhood Obesity' requested by WHO.

FENSA and ECHO are an odd related couple. Their relationship is indicated by a statement made on 10 June last year by WHO director-general Margaret Chan at the 8th global conference on health promotion held in Helsinki, Finland. What she said was remarkable, given the convention that senior UN officials are discreet, and given her own special diplomatic skills. She said:

> Efforts to prevent non-communicable diseases go against the business interests of powerful economic operators… It is not just Big Tobacco anymore. Public health must also contend with Big Food, Big Soda, and Big Alcohol. All of these industries fear regulation, and protect themselves by using the same tactics.
>
> Research has documented these tactics well. They include front groups, lobbies, promises of self-regulation, lawsuits, and industry-funded research that confuses the evidence and keeps the public in doubt. Tactics include gifts, grants, and contributions to worthy causes that cast these industries as respectable corporate citizens in the eyes of politicians and the public. They include arguments that place the responsibility for harm to health on individuals, and portray government actions as interference in personal liberties and free choice….
>
> Market power readily translates into political power. Few governments prioritize health over big business. As we learned… with the tobacco industry, a powerful corporation can sell the public just about anything… Not one single country has managed to turn around its obesity epidemic in all age groups. This is not a failure of individual will-power. This is a failure of political will to take on big business. I am deeply concerned by… efforts by industry to shape the public health policies and strategies that affect their products. When industry is involved in policy-making… the most effective control measures will be downplayed or left out entirely. This, too, is well documented, and dangerous.

Undermining the integrity of WHO

Now to put this statement in a context, of the preparations for FENSA open-ended inter-governmental meetings, known as FENSA-OEIGM. 'Non-state actors', the 'NSA' in FENSA, is a fairly new UN-speak term, which lumps together 'non-governmental organisations, private sector entities, philanthrophic foundations and academic institutions'. 'Private sector entities' in practice mainly means transnational corporations and their front and trade organisations, which in the context of public health and nutrition mainly means Coca-Cola, Pepsi-Co, Nestlé, Unilever, Danone, Mars, McDonald's, Yum! Brands, Kellogg's and such-like, and their suppliers and servants. 'Philanthrophic foundations' above all means the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Collaboration with NSAs of all types includes 'support to policy-making at the national level' and 'contributing to the implementation of WHO's policies'.

How does all this square with Margaret Chan's statement? It doesn't. More than half-way through her second term of office which ends in June 2017, she is warning that the integrity of WHO and its dedicated officials is being corrupted by forces which she cannot stop. Partnering with transnational corporations, aka 'the private sector', has been imposed on WHO by the UN as part of its overall corporate-friendly 'Global Compact', under pressure from the most powerful member states. Also, WHO for many years has been starved of funds from member states, and around four-fifths of its funding now is for 'earmarked' initiatives, rendering WHO not the agent of member states as a whole, but the servant of its richest funders. *WHO is in a double arm-lock.* The US, the European bloc, and other high income fully industrialised 'market economies' are forcing WHO to comply with transnational corporations, including those listed above. That is the writing on the wall.



Here are some of the energy-dense fatty, sugary or salty ultra-processed products of the transnational Big Food and Big Soda corporations, which distort the WHO global strategy on diet and health

The commercial 'non-state actors' that most WHO officials like to do business with, are the generic trade organisations: corporate tools such as the International Food and Beverage Alliance. IFBA was set up in 2008 to ensure unified policy positions, so as to shape UN and national food policy strategies, and to ensure that ultra-processed product marketing remains under corporate control. Voluntary guidelines have been specified and controlled by IBFA members by means of made-to-measure 'public-private partnerships' which rationalise discussion on voluntary reformulation of some of their products, in ways liable to generate health claims that enhance their bottom lines and share prices. While competitive for 'market share' of the same types of product such as soft drinks, burgers, biscuits, and sugared breakfast cereals, all Big Food corporations share an identical global governing strategy. This is to displace food supplies based on foods and meals with ready-to-consume branded snacks, now especially in the global South. They run as a pack. Threatened, they attack as a pack.

On 27 March IBFA secretary-general Rocco Renaldi sent a note to IBFA members. With his team he had been in Geneva making music with the US, UK, Canadian and other missions to WHO. The note's 65-colleague mailing list included Beate Lloyd, Ulrike Sapiro and Maxime Buyckx of Coca-Cola, Chavanne Hanson of Nestlé, Anne Heughan of Unilever, Louis Vareille of Danone; and Alistair Hide of Monsanto, Taryn Barclay of Cargill, Anne Andreas Bluethner of BASF, Kaspar Meldgaard Nielson of Novo Enzymes, Manfred Eggersdorfer and Klaus Kraemer of the supplement corporation DSM, Margaret Creedon of Abbott Laboratories, Birgit Schleifenbaum of the food flavour business Firmenich, Bonnie McClafferty and Jonathan Tench of GAIN, and Maria Zipsiti of the industry body Food and Drink Europe. No farmers. Rocco Renaldi indicated that everything is under control:

> Following a meeting of the WEOG group (Western Europe, Australia, Canada, Israel, New Zealand, US) last week there is full alignment among these countries on a position that is essentially equivalent to ours… Expect compromises, but not on the red lines … with regard to which WEOG will not accept any document that excludes the food and beverage industry from the Framework…The US forecast is that it will be possible to make sufficient progress for a new draft Framework to be developed in the run up to WHA and to be finalized via drafting groups during the WHA.



ECHO in Manila. WHO official Tim Armstrong; Commissioners Sania Nishtar, Betty King, Constance Chan Hon Yee, Colin Tukuitonga; Delen de la Paz of the People's Health Movement

Box 1

ECHO 'Issues and responsibilities'

Extract from the ECHO interim report. The Commission recognizes that the scope of policy options to address childhood obesity is broad and contains a number of novel elements including a focus on the lifecourse dimension. A multisectoral approach will be essential for sustained progress, but the Commission is mindful of the significant challenges that currently exist for governments, civil society and the private sector. It is also cognizant of the potential spill-over benefits and costs from these issues to many other areas of policy formation. Indeed, reconciling these issues creates major challenges for stakeholders.

Transnationals and childhood obesity

Now for the Commission to End Childhood Obesity (ECHO) of 15 'accomplished and eminent individuals', *agreed at last year's WHA.* Plus two working groups, it includes 59 people, plus the WHO secretariat headed by Tim Armstrong (left, above). Co-chair is Sania Nishtar (next to left, above). After five meetings of the commission and the working groups, this March *an interim ECHO report was circulated.* Meetings with NSAs 'to solicit broad-based stakeholder input' are due in all WHO regions. That in Manila was held on 24-25 March, attended by four commissioners (shown above).An appraisal of the ECHO report came from the *People's Health Movement* (PHM) represented in Manila by Delen de la Paz (right, above). A common response of independent groups is that it is a wretched document with little apparent grasp of the enormity of the issues, peppered with officialese buzz-phrases with no real meaning. The passages quoted in Boxes 1 and 2, above and below, are typical.

Box 2

ECHO 'overarching policy considerations'

Extract from the ECHO interim report

I Governments have the essential role in coordinating and addressing the challenge of childhood obesity and providing an appropriate regulatory and statutory framework.
II Consistent and coordinated multi-sectoral and multi-stake-holder approaches are required to address childhood obesity.
III New approaches to addressing the challenge will require constructive, transparent and accountable relationships between government, the private sector and civil society.
IV. Policy implementation requires consideration of different contexts not only between regions and countries but also within countries, taking into account gender and equity.
V. A monitoring and accountability framework will be required at a national level to ensure effective policy implementation and action.



Here are more of the energy-dense fatty, sugary or salty ultra-processed products of the transnational Big Food and Big Soda corporations, now partners with WHO in the quest to end childhood obesity

Box 3

People's Health Movement on ECHO

Extract from the PHM response to the ECHO interim report. One of the critical factors which will determine the success or otherwise of the Commission, is *inspiration*. Does the process of the Commission's inquiry and its final report inspire people in government and in civil society to commit their voice and energy to driving implementation? The Commission's capacity to inspire the social movement needed to drive implementation appears to be threatened by the close engagement of the Commission with the transnational corporations who are driving the epidemic, and the timid, conciliatory and obfuscatory references to the private sector in this interim report. For the Commission to invest so heavily in consulting with the manufacturers of ultra-processed junk food but completely neglect small farmers and fisher folk (also private sector) risks generating cynicism rather than inspiration.

The PHM appraisal is courteous but critical, sometimes sharply so, as indicated in the extract (Box 3, above) from the PHM note. In response Betty King, whose paid job has been to represent the interests of the USA at the UN in Europe, said 'we cannot dismiss the private sector, because WHO is being funded by private groups like the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation which is the second biggest contributor to WHO, and they have been helping WHO a lot'. ECHO Co-chair Sania Nishtar said that PHM's approach could have been less confrontational and more constructive. Tim Armstrong said that WHO member states have 'mandated' WHO to work with the private sector and so they are working within their mandate when they engage with the private sector. The final ECHO report is due out at some time next year.

Together with FENSA and its OEIGMs, this all shows signs of a growing morbid and malignant process within WHO, even in initiatives like ECHO set up by WHO that are supposed to be independent. Unhappily, the evidence supports an ominous diagnosis. In Helsinki last year, Margaret Chan was surely speaking on behalf of WHO and its beleaguered officials. Uplifted by her speaking truth to power, it is the task of everybody committed to public health, including member state delegates at the WHA this month, to be aware, stand up, speak out, and be counted.

*The Update team. An ominous diagnosis. Big Food Watch. World Health Organization. [Update]. World Nutrition May 2015, **6**, 5, 346-350*



WN *Hot stuff. Dietary guidelines. US*

The dung hits the fan

Access November 2014 Brazilian dietary guidelines here
Access February 2015 DGAC report here
Access February 2015 DGAC executive summary here
Access March 2015 My Plate, My Planet open letter in New York Times here
Access March 2015 My Plate. My Planet fact sheet here
Access April 2015 Food Climate Research Network briefing here

The Update team reports:



'Hands Off My Hot Dog', the campaign of the North American Meat Institute, may well appeal to President Obama, here seen in a one-hand chow-down with UK Prime Minister David Cameron

Last month our story on the US *Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee report* issued in late February, was that after over a half a century of demonisation, dietary cholesterol has been declared to be practically harmless. Eggs and shrimps are back on the menu. The dairy and fishing industries are pleased.

Meat wars

This month our story concerns a war whose first battles will be lost or won this month. The official US government nutrition advisors recommend plant-based diets lower in red and processed meat. They add that such diets imply food systems and supplies that use less resources, essential for future food security – for instance, no water means no food, no food means no nutrition. But in the US the shots are called by politicians, and in the US a whole lot of senators and congressmen enjoy material support from agribusiness.

The North American Meat Institute has now swung into action with a Hands Off My Hot Dog campaign. US Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack has the duty to protect the interests of 'farmers', including the meat, meat product and animal feed corporations and their trade associations. They are furious. They say that meat is nourishing – which indeed it is, when consumed fresh. They also say that the environment is none of the damn business of a dietary guidelines committee, that the DGAC has exceeded its brief, and that its suggestions shown in Box 1 below must be struck off the record. The writing in the *Wall Street Journal* is that Secretary Vilsack will act in support of the National Cattlemen and their colleagues in the pork and dairy business. Their campaign funding includes support to *most of the 30 senators* from farming and ranching states who have written to Tom Vilsack questioning the 'scientific integrity' of the DGAC report.

Protect the planet!

So in the US the dung has hit the fan. Comments on the draft guidelines must be received in Washington by 8 May. This has spurred many organisations and experts to send an open letter *published in the New York Times* on 24 March to Tom Vilsack, and to Health Secretary Silvia Mathews Burwell. This strongly supports the DGAC's findings, which also include another mild observation:

> Current evidence shows that the average US diet has a larger environmental impact in terms of increased greenhouse gas emissions, land use, water use, and energy use.. Linking health, dietary guidance, and the environment will promote human health and the sustainability of natural resources and ensure current and long-term food security.

Signatories of the open letter include over 50 organisations, from the Sierra Club, Greenpeace, Friends of the Earth and Slow Food, to the Johns Hopkins Center for a Liveable Future, the Natural Resources Defense Council, the Coalition for Healthy School Food and the Science and Environmental Health Network. People signing include *WN* family members and contributors Marion Nestle, Raj Patel, and Anna Lappé – together with her mother Francis Moore, who started the food, nutrition and environment movement 45 years ago with *Diet for a Small Planet*.

Box 1

The draft US dietary guidelines on sustainability

Here is some of what the DGAC report says. From a fact sheet issued by the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg Center for a Liveable Planet.

Linking health, dietary guidance, and the environment will promote human health and the sustainability of natural resources and ensure current and long-term food security. The availability and acceptability of healthy and sustainable food choices will be necessary to attain food security for the US population over time... Consistent evidence indicates that, in general, a dietary pattern that is higher in plant-based foods, such as vegetables, fruits, whole grains, legumes, nuts, and seeds, and lower in animal-based foods is more health promoting and is associated with lesser environmental impact (GHG emissions and energy, land, and water use) than is the current average US diet.

Box 2

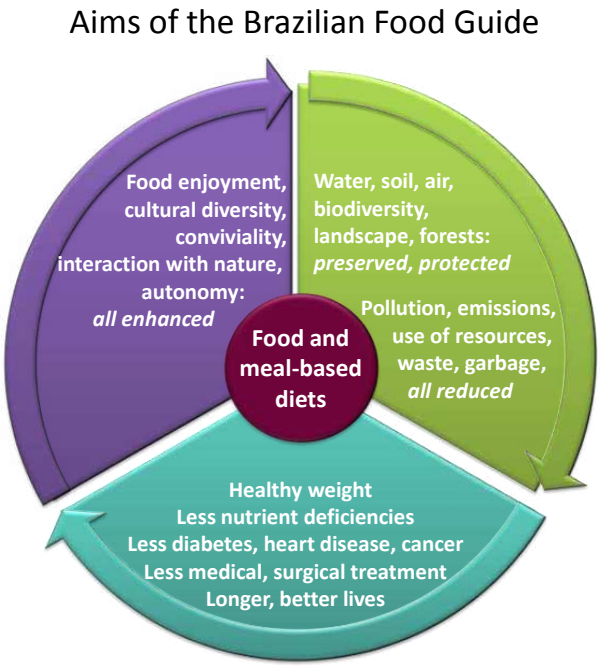
Friends of the Earth petition

At the time of writing this petition to President Obama and Secretaries Vilsack and Burwell has been signed by 150,000 people and rising.

We urge you to support the Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee's recommendation to include sustainability and issue clear guidance for reduced consumption of animal products and more plant-based foods... A diet with less meat and more plant-based foods is better for our health and the health of the planet. How food is produced also has a big impact on public health and the environment. More sustainable and humane food production methods that do not rely on the routine use of antibiotics, hormones, chemical fertilizers and toxic pesticides are better for the environment and public health. We rely on our government to provide accurate, science-based information.

Friends of the Earth in the US have weighed in with a petition to Secretaries Vilsack and Burwell (Box 2, above).

Brazil is a done deal



The benefits of the recommendations of the Brazilian dietary guidelines issued in November 2014 in graphic form. These integrate personal, social and environmental health and well-being

'My Plate, My Planet' points out that in other countries guidelines have already incorporated environmental sustainability and that *these include Brazil.* Indeed they do, as shown by the graphic above already published in *WN* showing the benefits of the Brazilian dietary recommendations once enacted, for the nourishment of the health and well-being of bodies, souls and the planet.

*The Update team. The dung hits the fan. Dietary guidelines. US. [Hot stuff] [Update]. World Nutrition May 2015, **6**, 5, 351-353*



WN *Big Food Watch. Jorge Lemann*

The big whopper buy-out



Burger King, Budweiser, Heinz, and now Kraft, are now all owned by 3G Capital, of whom the mastermind is Jorge Paulo Lemann, once a tennis champion (above), now Brazil's top billionaire

The Brazilian Update team reports:

For some time now McDonald's, Yum Brands and Burger King have been slugging it out to keep or grab the lead in the US and global meat product-based fast food business. The leaders of these corporations have all been faceless, unless you count Ronald McDonald or Colonel Sanders. Now though, there is a glittering real live man on the scene. This is the saturnine Jorge Paulo Lemann (above), identified by *Bloomberg Business* magazine as 'the world's most interesting billionaire'.

Surf, spear and strip

Jorge Lemann at 75 is now the #1 Brazilian plutocrat at $US 25.8 billion, ranked #26 in the world and climbing. Swiss on his father's side and once a tennis champion, he with partners in 1971 founded Garantia, a broker they made into an investment bank that became known as the Brazilian Goldman Sachs. He stayed adventurous, having been a surfer then a spear fisherman, with audacious deals. In 1994 Garantia made $US 1 billion profit and brought former UK prime minister Margaret Thatcher to Brazil for business meetings. *Folha de Sao Paulo* described the bank as 'swift in its decisions, merciless with its enemies, it fights to kill. A true "serial killer".'

He then founded in 2004 the investment corporation 3G Capital, which in a succession of takeovers bought a bunch of beer corporations including Anheuser Busch (Budweiser among other brands). He then took over a series of US-based

corporations – in 2010 Burger King; then in 2013 Heinz; then on 25 March this year Kraft, which together make the third biggest food product conglomerate in the US, after PepsiCo and Tyson. Their combined share value, with other 3G holdings, is well over $US 200 billion, a substantial fraction of which is held by Jorge Lemann and his closest partners. These deals have been highly leveraged: 3G has gained capital notably from Warren Buffett, who regards Jorge Lemann as his 'professor' in the craft and art of making money, and who as quoted in *BBC Business News* says

> I am delighted to play a part in bringing these two winning companies and their iconic brands together. This is my kind of transaction, uniting two world-class organisations and delivering shareholder value. I'm excited by the opportunities for what this new combined organisation will achieve.

Keep products simple

Jorge Lemann learned a lot from visiting Sam Walton and examining Walmart's lean mean methods in the 1980s. A tenet of 3G is to avoid innovation and instead to find businesses that mass-manufacture simple successful products, and then strip out their non-core material and human assets. As recently explained in *BBC Business News*

> The company makes its fortunes by finding optimum ways of producing something simple - like a burger or ketchup - and repeating that formula on a larger scale, without requiring much creativity. This model is well-suited to the food industry, where you can make a lot of money if you are disciplined enough to avoid waste when producing.

After takeovers 3G put in their own men, originally hired on the basis of the motto PSD, short for 'poor, smart, deep desire to get rich'. The new directors then get their chain-saws out and cut down material and human costs. In 2008, after taking over Anheuser-Busch, 3G sacked 1,400 employees. Burger King became a franchise and 28,000 staff were chopped. In 2013, 600 Heinz executives and staff were axed. Christine Correa, author of *Dream Big,* the story of 3G and the men who made it, says

> They take cost-cutting very seriously. Some people get really scared by that. Afterwards, of course, the company grows and they end up hiring again, but at the start it is ugly.

There are no pictures of Jorge Lemann chugging beer or chowing down on a burger. He is classy, avoids alcohol, and enjoys salads and real meals. He enjoys Budweiser and Burger King because as run lean and mean by 3G they are profit machines. The takeovers of Heinz and Kraft are synergistic, maybe by design. Together, a whopper burger, plus tomato ketchup or HP sauce or mayonnaise, plus Kool-Aid, are almost a whole ready-to-chow-and-chug-meal, to which all sorts of Kraft snackettes could be added. All that is missing is the bun – and the soda. Some observers think that Jorge Lemann's next big kill is PepsiCo. Others think he will spear Coca-Cola, of which Warren Buffett is the biggest single shareholder with 400 million shares, 9.2 per cent of the stock, valued at $16 billion. So, if Warren really does think that his friend Jorge is the professor of making money… Remember you read this here first…

The Big Food Watch team. The big whopper buy-out. Jorge Lemann [Update]. World Nutrition May 2015, ***6****, 5, 354-355*

***WN** Development. China*

Intensive agriculture devastates ecosystems

Access 2015 Science of Total Environment paper John Dearing et al here



Traditional Chinese farming (left) preserves the environment and is of food made by people into meals by the community. Industrial Chinese agriculture (right) destroys ecosystems and is of commodities made by machines for human, animal and other consumption; much of it is exported

John Dearing writes:

China's very rapid development of more intensive agriculture systems has kept its cities well-fed, and has helped to lift millions of rural communities out of poverty. But it has come at great cost. As one example that a team of which I am a member has investigated, ecosystems in eastern China, which should be one of the country's most fertile regions, have already been badly damaged, some beyond repair, and the consequences will be felt across the world.

This is part of a long-running trade-off between rising levels of food produced by modern intensive methods and a deteriorating environment, revealed in recent research we have conducted with colleagues from China and the UK. Yields of crops and fish have risen over the past 60 years at several locations we studied in Anhui, Jiangsu and Shanghai Provinces in eastern China. But these are paralleled by long-term trends in poorer air and water quality, and reduced soil stability.

No thought for the future

Increasing agricultural productivity has helped to lift many millions of rural Chinese families out of poverty. But for agriculture and aquaculture to be sustainable from one generation to the next, the natural processes that stabilise soils, purify water or store carbon have to be maintained in stable states. These natural processes represent benefits for society, known as ecosystem services.

In the second half of the last century, these services were being lost relatively slowly through the cumulative, everyday actions of family farmers. But the problems accelerated in the 1980s when farmers began to use more intensive methods with artificial fertilisers, and again after 2004 when chemical inputs were subsidised.



Landscapes in Yunnan. (Above) stable, cultivated terraced slopes contrast with badly gullied slopes, (Below). The clear waters of lake Erhai before 2001 contrast with more recent algal contamination

In some localities, slow deterioration has now become a vortex – a rapid downward spiral. Some aquatic ecosystems have dropped over tipping points into new states where clear lakes suddenly become dominated by green algae with losses of high-value fish. These states frustrate continued high-level production of crops and fish, and they are very difficult and expensive to restore. Natural processes are degraded and destabilised to the point that they cannot be depended upon to support intensive agriculture in the near future. The whole region is losing its ability to withstand the impact of extreme events, from typhoons to global commodity prices.

Thought for the future

National policy must give a high priority to sustainable agriculture. This will mean big changes on the farm. Chemical inputs such as fertilisers and pesticides must be applied in the correct quantities at the right time of the year. Cattle slurry and human sewage must be disposed of properly. Chemicals getting into streams and rivers must be reduced. Fish feed and the use of biocides in the farming of fish has to be controlled.

This is easier said than done. In China, farmers are still generally poor, badly educated and ageing. Good agricultural advice is lacking, and big cities still tempt the younger farmers away from their fields. Rapid action is unlikely.

The recent introduction by the Chinese authorities of the current land reform policy, allows farmers to rent their land to larger combines. The policy is designed to overcome the inefficiencies of small farm holdings, but it may not be taken up widely in the more marginal landscapes where potential profits are low. There is need for an improved system of information and technology transfer to smallholders, probably involving a more efficient coordination between agencies.

The global picture

There is a larger-scale context to this problem. China's grain production has risen fivefold since the 1950s, outstripping the pace of population growth. Despite this, the nation is no longer self-sufficient. The shift towards more meat production and thus consumption has created a demand for the production of soybeans and cereals for animal feed that can no longer be met within China. In 2012, China imported more than 60 per cent of all the world's soybeans that were available for export, and cereal imports are also on the up.

Reliance on imports is nothing new. But in China the additional risk that agriculture is increasingly unsustainable may amplify demand. The potential scale of demand for imports is bound to have repercussions for global food production and food prices.

Box 1

Sustainable Chinese agriculture

John Dearing writes: The Integrated History and Future of People on Earth (IHOPE) initiative is a global network of researchers and projects that link human and Earth systems history, through the integration of knowledge and resources from the biophysical and the social sciences, and the humanities. It draws together scientists from mainly the UK and China with the aim of assessing the sustainability of modern agriculture across China through understanding its regional social-ecological dynamics. The aim of this long-running project is to improve the scientific basis for sustainable agriculture using long social and ecological records to define the key dynamics of agricultural and related systems.

Rapid economic growth in China over the past 20 years has taken huge numbers of people out of poverty but at great cost to ecosystems. Soil erosion, water pollution, loss of biodiversity, and urban haze, all have created crises for environmental management. In the case of agriculture there is some evidence that this ecological degradation is even beginning to cause food insecurity.

From knowledge to policy to action

We have organised and run workshop sessions in China with environmental managers, surveyed the attitudes of rural farmers to ecological degradation and created a website, with a Chinese version, that now receives over 1000 visits per month. Change in China comes from the top. Our tactic has therefore been to aggregate the findings from scientific study, social survey, and official discussions, and set them in the context of recent government statements about sustainable management of resources.

Our aim has been to develop an empirical, evolutionary approach to the study of the nonlinear dynamics of a rapidly changing region in eastern China, which includes the rapidly growing cities of Shanghai and Nanjing. We are showing how analyses of time-series of social, economic and ecological conditions can provide an evolutionary perspective for the modern Lower Yangtze River Basin region since the 1950s.

This is an edited version of a feature in the Australian journal Business Spectator

Dearing J. Intensive agriculture devastates ecosystems. [Development. China]. [Update]. World Nutrition May 2015, ***6,*** *5,356-358*



WN *Farming. China*

The urban and rural planning of cities

Access May 2014 Enrique Jacoby at al on family farming in the Americas here
Access October 2014 Stefania Vezzosi et al on traditional farming in Tuscany here



Agriculture is coming to the new and rapidly expanding cities of China. Communities that are leaving rural areas are finding work and growing food within the cities, using traditional methods

Mark Wahlqvist writes:

In 2011 a great change came to China. This is the year from and after which more than half of the population lives in and around cities. This could be catastrophic in a country of more than a billion people, for only 10 per cent of China's land is arable, and much of that has become polluted with the intensive drive to industrialisation. But in many parts of China, farmers are bringing their knowledge and skills into the cities, and creating smallholdings and gardens to raise animals and grow crops in the new urban areas.

This is not new. China is a country whose agricultural ingenuity is as deep as the buildings in its new cities are high. Many of China's largest cities historically were sustained with produce sold within 10 kilometres from the farm and within a day of its being ready for sale. The Chinese civilisation includes efficient methods for food production and waste management, converting biomass into useable clean energy.



Land unsuitable for or claimed from building in the new cities is being converted into allotments and smallholdings whose soil is protected from erosion by age-old methods of terracing and constant care

In the late 20th century Shanghai produced nearly all its chicken, eggs and milk, most of its freshwater fish and vegetables, and half of its pork, in a 300,000 hectare green ring round the city, managed by the municipality – in effect, a vast urban farming complex.

Making the cities green

The initiatives now being taken by China's municipal authorities, and also by communities of farmers from rural areas who are coming into the new and expanding cities, are models for urban renewal, planning and development all over the world. Another aspect of greening cities is the integration of parkland, gardens and trees and bushes into inner as well as outer city areas, all of which can include cultivation of vegetables, fruits and other crops, and also the collective rearing of small animals with their produce.

In such ways the cities of China and elsewhere in the world can become green and clean, and more of their communities and families well employed and happy, all made possible by imaginative and appropriate urban design fit to face the future. This prospect of sustainability is also an aspect of nourishment and well-being.

Wahlqvist M. The urban and rural planning of cities. [Farming. China]. [Update]. World Nutrition May 2015, ***6,*** *5,359-360*



Brazilian dietary guidelines

Good news from India

Raj Patel and Amit Srivastava report:

A landmark decision in the Delhi high court has demanded the restriction of junk food available in and around India's schools. This is a terrific first step in reducing the consumption of foods likely seriously to harm Indian children's health in the future. India's nutritionists and paediatricians have now called for more aggressive responses to tackle the national diabetes epidemic. Mustering the will to do what's necessary can be hard, especially given an increasingly powerful food product manufacturing industry.

Good science informs good policy and generates the good will necessary to create it. Consider, for instance, Brazil's recent advances in public health. Rather than advise what to eat, the new Brazilian national official dietary guidelines encourage citizens to think about how to eat. They trust their citizens' intelligence.

In common with those of many countries, Indian dietary guidelines encourage a variety of foods. The Brazilian guidelines encourage eating in company. Indian guidelines warn against too much salt. Brazilian guidelines warn against any ready-to-consume 'ultra-processed food products'. This last idea matters a great deal in India. The Delhi high court wrestled with defining 'junk food'. The manufacturers claimed that there is no such thing as junk food.

This came as a surprise both to anyone with basic common sense, but would also surprise the Brazilian government, which has adopted ideas based on the nutritional science of world-class epidemiologists like Carlos Monteiro and his colleagues at the University of São Paulo. They came across the idea of 'ultra-processed food products' a decade ago while they were trying to solve a mystery. Brazilians were increasingly suffering and dying of diseases associated with diet, the kinds of illnesses that are killing and maiming millions of Indians.

The mystery solved

What was impressive though, was the reason. Conventional nutrition science warns that eating more than specified amounts of fat, sugar and salt is bad. But the increase in waistlines, morbidity and mortality of Brazilians could not be explained by consuming more of these substances as such. What was changing, was the forms in which fat, sugar and salt enter Brazilians' stomachs.

The team at the University of São Paulo found that additional fat, sugar and salt was not coming from fresh foods like meat and milk, or relatively simply processed foods such as breads, dairy products and cheeses, or from oils and sugars used as culinary

preparations in the making of meals. They were coming from ultra-processed products which are not modified foods, but which are typically made solely or mostly from industrial ingredients, often with many additives.

Just like their counterparts in India, Brazil's rural poor need to process their food to prevent spoilage and waste. Traditional food processing is necessary for people to be able to feed themselves, and Brazil's guidelines are geared toward supporting small-scale farmers. But cleaned, dried, fermented and pasteurised foods are not the problem.

The modern food manufacturing industry has invented, refined and elaborated many technologies such as hydrolysing, hydrogenation and and extrusion which produce products with no real resemblance to fresh or minimally processed foods. It is these products, which are typically calorie-dense and fatty, sugary or salty, that are the big problem. They are ready to eat or heat, and designed to have a long shelf life, to be habit-forming, and to be consumed anywhere. Think packaged snacks, burgers and soft drinks – the types of product that threaten to replace natural and minimally processed foods like *sabzi, dal* and *roti* often cooked at homes across India.

The rise in marketing, sales and consumption of these products, say the University of São Paulo team in a series of seminal commentaries and peer-reviewed papers, is what is driving the rise obesity and chronic diseases like diabetes in Brazil, and also internationally. This is why Brazil's guidelines don't advise citizens what to eat, but to think about the extent to which what they're eating is processed, and to make natural and minimally processed food the basis of their diet.

Action against propaganda

Constant consumption of ultra-processed products is harmful. Children are ill-equipped to judge how much to consume, and tastes are created early in childhood. With all this in mind, another official Brazilian agency has encouraged action surpassing that of the Delhi high court. Brazil's National Council for Defence of Children and Adolescents Rights is proposing the banning of marketing of all products of all types to children, on the compelling grounds that children are vulnerable and should not be exposed to propaganda. In the same way, the Brazilian dietary guidelines ask that people be wary and critical of all forms of food marketing and advertising.

Ultra-processed products are damaging the health of nations. Now that Brazil, a nation of 200 million people, is developing effective policies around the idea of 'ultra-processed products', the Indian government should do so too.

This is an edited version of a feature in The Times of India

Patel R, Srivastava A. Brazilian dietary guidelines. Good news from India. [Update]. World Nutrition May 2015, ***6,*** *5,361-362*

***WN** Development*

Visions for this century (6)

Access November 2014 Visions for this century (1) here
Access December 2014 Visions for this century (2) here
Access January-February 2015 Visions for this century (3) here
Access March 2015 Visions for this century (4) here
Access April 2015 Visions for this century (5) here

Brooke Aksnes writes:

In the last five issues, *WN* editorial family members write about the state of the world now, and their visions for the future. See above. We will continue to publish *Visions* throughout 2015, as *Updates*, and as letters in our *Feedback* section.

Ashok Bhurtyal



A child in Kathmandu who survived the Nepal earthquake. Ashok Bhurtyal's Vision was written before the catastrophe and what follows has not been changed. We await news from him and family

What mainly determines population well-being, health, and disease?

Human health is mainly determined by the way people interact with the living and physical environments and ecosystems where they live, work, play, learn, teach, and so on. It is essentially all the same as in the days of Hippocrates. Bad relationships between and within groups of people are the cause of most problems throughout the history of public health. Thus, aggressive encroachment of long established balanced

ecosystems such as those in my country of Nepal, by new technologies and construction and transport systems and other industries, and so forth, have unnecessarily put many species in peril and have harmed human health.

What mainly determines good population nutritional status?

Determinants of nutrition are much the same as those that determine health in general. More specifically, the mechanisms and players that influence, control or manage the food systems in any given society have a direct impact on nutritional outcomes for that society's members. Additionally, the ways in which intervention programmes are implemented affects nutritional outcomes, be they good or bad. Again I give the example of Nepal, over the past 40 years.

Nepal has rich topography, ecology and culture. Nepali children should not suffer from malnutrition. Certainly, rates of malnutrition should never have been high. But progress in reducing child malnutrition has been slow. This is mainly because the policies chosen and the actions taken have been misguided. First came supplementation *of micronutrients such as vitamin A*, based on the idea that vitamin A deficiency was a top public health priority. Then came growth monitoring, based on the idea that Nepali children suffer from stunting.

Such interventions have supported the investigators who have carried them out and published the results. They have not been much help to Nepali children, women or other vulnerable groups. They have consumed scarce human and financial resources that should have been directed to develop and carry out effective and appropriate nutrition programmes and policies. Now genetically modified plants are being touted. In future, our forests and wilderness areas are likely to be targeted. It is only now that real attention is at last being given to food-based programmes. Why has this taken so long?

How useful are the current nutritional sciences?

Not very. It is now time properly and fully to explore the validity of indigenous and traditional practices, in order better to understand why some civilisations and cultures have enjoyed healthy nutrition while others have been lacking, and to replicate successful systems and practices.

Are enough governments and official agencies making real progress?

No. There have been some attempts, but generally these are not derived from sound principles, and are ineffective in action.

Are current dietary guidelines and nutrition education programmes effective?

Generally, no. A frequently cited exception is the new Brazilian guidelines. What is often overlooked in nutrition policy is the wealth of good practices native to so many

cultures around the world. These practices, tried and tested over many generations, could be consolidated into a set of guidelines. Unfortunately, some guidelines such as those issued by UN agencies are influenced by industry interests – I am thinking here in particular of food supplementation and fortification recommendations.

What types of civil society groups are most responsive to the big issues?

In Nepal we find that some civil society groups genuinely advocate for the common good, while others are critical but not constructive or simply make commotions. There also remains a huge untapped potential in building movements genuinely based within Nepali communities, following indigenous and traditional structures. These have always existed in many villages in low-income countries.

Name up to three inspiring leaders likely to be active to 2030, with reasons

Sharad Onta, here in Nepal, is my one choice. His ways of education will become better known and more influential in the coming two decades. He is both technically competent and socially conscientious. His teachings are already very popular. His perspective helps students and teachers alike to become liberated from misguided perceptions. He inspires public health leaders who are and will be trailblazers

Identify up to three of your greatest fears, with reasons

Again, just one. My great fear is the hijacking of our food systems by transnational corporations. If left unchecked they, aided by their 'partners' in governments, official agencies and even the academic world, will sabotage good nutrition initiatives, in favour of profit above all, at great cost to humans and ecosystems.

Identify up to three of your greatest hopes, with reasons

I have hope for the many people in universities and research centres who are dedicated to practising science honestly even in this age where science is so often auctioned off to the highest commercial bidder. But my greatest hope lies in local communities, these founts of reliable knowledge. People seen as being at the bottom of societal hierarchies, including impoverished and indigenous communities, still practice methods that ensure their nutrition and protect their health that have nurtured over millennia and in tune with nature. These customs should be respected.

Make any other remarks as you may wish

For this 21st century, all of us dedicated to public health and nutrition must get organised and connected into networks. It is also our duty to recognise and foster social movements at all levels, in villages, districts, nationally and internationally, that protect and promote health and well-being.

*Bhurtyal A. Development. Visions for this century: 6 [Update]. World Nutrition May 2015, **6**, 5, 363-365*