WN *Feedback*

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WN *The Food System. Mexico*

'Free trade' causes misery and diabesity

Access Fabruary 2013 Paul Nicholson on La Via Campesina here
Access July 2014 Big Food Watch on the Mexican Alliance for Healthy Food here
Access September 2014 Duke-Oxfam report on food systems and inequity here
Access December 2014 Big Food Watch on diabesity in Mexico here
Access February 2015 Grain full report on Mexican junk food epidemic here
Access March 2015 Update on diabetes in Mexico here
Access April 2015 Feedback Pilar Zazueta on roots of diabesity in Mexico here



Some of the people who work for and consult Grain, the social movement responsible for the report on impact of 'free trade' on Mexico summarised below. Ramón Vera Herrera is sitting front, left

Ramón Vera Herrera writes:

This follows recent *WN Updates* and *Feedback*, some of which can be accessed above, on the causes of obesity and diabetes in the global South. I work with the social movement Grain (access our brochure, and the full account with references of which this note is a summary, above). Grain has strong links with *La Via Campesina* (see Paul Nicholson's *WN* commentary above).

Digging in the pyramid

Transnational food corporations know that their main growth now is in the South, because countries in the North are now more or less saturated with their products. To increase their profits they need to 'dig down into the pyramid', as one corporate executive puts it. This means developing and selling products targeted at the billions of the world's poor, who customarily eat food from their own farms or informal markets selling locally-produced foods, in which many of them earn their livelihood. To get at these potential consumers, corporations are infiltrating, inundating and taking over national food manufacturing, distribution and retailing systems and replacing local foods with cheap processed junk products, often with support from the national governments. 'Free trade', including special deals for foreign corporate investors, is critical to their success.

In Mexico, poverty, hunger, obesity and disease go hand in hand. Mexicans are struggling to afford enough to eat. Also, what they eat is making them ill. In 2012, Mexico's National Institute for Public Health released the results of a national survey whose results make clear that the crisis is far worse than previously thought. Between 1988 and 2012, the proportion of overweight women aged 20-49 increased from 25 to 35.5% and the number of obese women in this age group increased from 9.5 to 37.5%. A staggering 29% of Mexican children aged 5-11 were overweight, as were 35% of youngsters aged between 11-19.

Rates of diabetes are equally troubling. There are 6.5-10 million people with diabetes in Mexico, if which around an estimated 2 million are unaware that they have the disease – so over 7% of Mexicans are diabetic. The incidence rises to 21% for those aged 65-74. Diabetes is now the third most common direct or indirect cause of death in Mexico. By 2025 12 million diabetic Mexicans are projected

> Diabetes linked with obesity is a very serious health problem in Mexico and our country paid an amount equivalent to 2.97 billion pesos [$US 228 million] in 2003 and 8.8 billion pesos [$Us 670 million] in 2010 for treatments related to diabetes. This is a 290% increase in just seven years

says Alexandro Calvillo of *El Poder del Consumidor*, the national consumer protection group, and of the Mexican Alliance for Health Food. The Ministry of Health puts the cost of obesity treatments at 80 billion pesos (about $US 6 billion), which could double by 2017.

NAFTA – a corporate bonanza

All these data cannot be explained away by some notion such as 'a change in the pattern of food consumption due to expanded possibilities and options'. Unhealthy food and drink products have been imposed on the country, while foods produced and nurtured by people according to their cultures and to their real needs are becoming scarce.

The various so-called 'free trade' agreements that Mexico has signed over the past two decades have had a profound impact on the country's food system. After his

mission to Mexico in 2012, the then UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, Olivier De Schutter, concluded:

> Trade policies currently in place favour greater reliance on heavily processed and refined foods with a long shelf life rather than on the consumption of fresh and more perishable foods, particularly fruit and vegetables... The overweight and obesity emergency that Mexico is facing could have been avoided, or largely mitigated, if the health concerns linked to shifting diets had been integrated into the design of those policies.

The corporate investment benefits of these agreements are as much of a problem as the freedoms they give for corporate trade. Under its investment provisions, NAFTA requires Mexico to provide equal treatment to domestic and foreign investors, with the elimination of rules preventing foreign investors from owning more than 49% of a company. It also gives increased rights for foreign investors to retain profits and returns from initial investments.

NAFTA triggered an upsurge of direct investment from US corporations into the Mexican food processing industry. In 1999 US food processing companies invested $US 5.3 billion in Mexico, a 25-fold increase from $US 210 million in 1987, and more than double the $US 2.3 billion in the year before NAFTA. Between 1999 and 2004 approximately two-thirds of the $US 6.4 billion foreign direct investment in Mexican agriculture and food industries was from the US. Nearly three-quarters of such investment was into the production of processed food and drink products. Between 1995 and 2003, sales of such products expanded by 5-10% per year.

Sales of soft drinks, biscuits and other baked goods, snack and junk products, and dairy products, rose faster than any other category. Servings of 8 ounce soft drinks rose from 275 servings a person a year in 1992, to 487 servings in 2002. All the biggest transnational processed product corporations, such as Coca-Cola, PepsiCo, Nestlé, Unilever and Danone, have expanded their Mexican operations and are making big money. Total sales of processed food and drink products in Mexico was $US 124 billion in 2012, and corporations pocketed $US 28.33 billion in profits from these sales, nearly $US 9 billion more than in Brazil, Latin America's largest economy.

Mexico is now one of the ten biggest producers of processed food products in the world. The country is a haven for Big Food corporations, with costs around a seventh lower than in the US. The Mexican government has signed 12 'free trade' agreements with 44 nations, giving tariff preference and special access to big markets such as the European Union and the US. So in spite of the global economic crisis, sales have grown steadily in the last three years.

The token tax on junk

Last year the Mexican government, under pressure, passed a bill to apply an 8% tax on high-calorie packaged foods, including sweetened breakfast cereals. It also passed a special tax of one peso (8 US cents) per litre on soft drinks. The government

represented this as a tough measure to curb sales of junk foods. But without complementary actions to encourage healthy alternatives, the tax may in effect be merely a grab for a share of income from the lucrative junk food trade that the government's own policies have facilitated. The only difference is that Mexican consumers will have to pay more for the foods that are killing them.

As if to drive this point home, immediately after the tax was passed PepsiCo, the leading producer of snack products in the country, announced an investment of $US 5 billion in its Mexico operations, while Nestlé pledged a $US 1 billion investment. These vast amounts of money are for publicity or marketing and also for innovation, brand building, infrastructure, and new links with agriculture and public relations and 'projects' with communities. The transnationals are in Mexico to stay.

Point of sale domination

Big Food corporations are confident of their capacity to increase sales despite the new tax, because of the control they have over food distribution. A second effect of NAFTA on the Mexican food system has been an explosive growth of chain supermarkets, discounters and convenience stores, from less than 700 pre-NAFTA to 3,850 in 1997 and 5,729 in 2004. Wal-Mart is now the nation's leading retailer. Huge supermarkets concentrate goods, but a crucial corporate strategy has been aggressively to take over corner shops (*tienditas*). There are some 400,000 *tiendas, estanquillos* or other small premises in Mexico, stores smaller than 10 square meters which carry a limited variety of products, and equipped with a limited amount of refrigeration and inventory.

These are crucial to the spread of junk food products. They are how transnationals and domestic food companies sell and promote these products to poorer populations in small towns and communities. By the early 2000s over 90% of all Coca Cola and PepsiCo sales were from *tiendas.* PepsiCo distributes its soft drinks to *tiendas* and also its *Sonric* line of candies, with varieties of its *Sabritas* potato chips. Each product line has enormous sales because of what the industry calls 'the absolute domination of the sales point'. People will eat what they have at hand, and the available goods are almost only processed products.

Tiendas are now quickly being replaced by corporate retailers that offer the processed product corporations even greater sales and profits. By 2012, retail chains had displaced *tiendas* as Mexico's main source of food sales, with 35% of the country's market, and *tiendas* holding on to 30% and open street markets having 25%. For example Oxxo (owned by Coca-Cola subsidiary Femsa) tripled its stores to 3,500 between 1999 and 2004, and will open its 14,000th store sometime this year. This means opening 1,000 stores per year, an average of 3 a day. Oxxo did more than US 1 billion of trade during the first trimester of 2012 and more than $US 5 billion during the third trimester of 2014. During 2014 Oxxo became the second largest retailer in the country behind Walmart, crushing the tiendas, and the families who have operated them.

Sweet business

The transnational food processing corporations spend enormous amounts of money on public relations. Advertisements across Mexico associate these companies with family values, sustainability, charity, good health and quality jobs. They are particularly interested in being visibly involved in government campaigns, and Mexico's governments embrace their participation.

Thus in April 2013 the Ministry of Social Development signed agreements with PepsiCo and Nestlé to involve them in the government's 'National Crusade Against Hunger'. Under the agreement, the Ministry provides 'federal subsidies for the execution of projects in selected priority zones' while the corporations claim that they 'will guarantee food security through nutritional products for the populations in poverty and extreme poverty'.

PepsiCo has pledged to build a 'Global Baking Category Innovation Centre' in Monterrey. Nestlé is focusing on 'women entrepreneurs' with *Mi Dulce Negocio* (My Sweet Business), which the company also runs in Venezuela and Bolivia. The plan is to train 1,500 Mexican women to make sweet but 'nutritious' desserts containing Nestlé products, and to supply these women with kits so that they can go out and train another ten women each. In total, 15,000 Mexican women will be mobilised in 'priority zones' across the country to promote the Nestlé way of nourishing children, with the financial support of Mexico's Ministry of Social Development.

In Mexico, 78.5 million people now suffer from food insecurity. Yet there are close to 50 million Mexican adults who are overweight or obese – about 7 out of 10 adults – and 22.1 million adults who are obese. These people will be unwell for an average of close to 20 years during their lifetimes. Among the poorest 20 per cent, there are escalating rates of diabetes, cardiovascular disease and various cancers. Mexico's 'Crusade Against Hunger' will not solve the problem. No campaign against hunger can be effective with only a few pilot projects scattered around a huge country. The Crusade targets only 7.8 million people, barely a tenth of the number of Mexicans suffering from food insecurity, and only slightly higher than the 5.1 million children under 5 years old suffering from malnutrition. Its priority zones are not in the areas with extreme hunger or poverty.

Taxing soft drinks is only 'a soft-policy instrument' says Olivier de Schutter, because 'it locates the problem of overweight and obesity in consumers' behaviour, when in fact this problem stems from the food system as a whole'. A programme to deal effectively with hunger and malnutrition has to support Mexico's small farmers and peasants. They constitute a substantial percentage of the country's poor, and they can best supply both rural and urban populations with nutritious foods. But while more than 95% of expenditure by the government on social programmes target the poor, less than 8% of expenditure on agriculture programmes are similarly targeted. Thus in 2005, the six poorest states received only 7% of total agricultural public expenditures despite the their populations of 55% of the extreme poor.

The way out of disaster

After hearing hundreds of testimonies from around the country, the international jury of the Peoples Permanent Tribunal held in México City in November 2013, concluded:

> Mexico could recover its self-sufficiency in food if there was official support for peasant agriculture backed with amounts comparable to the support granted to the big corporations. One of the necessary conditions for this would be the reconstitution of the instruments of support for the countryside that were disabled by NAFTA. The loss of food sovereignty directly caused by this array of policies has, as its main component, induced changes in the Mexican diet, with catastrophic effects.
>
> *La Via Campesina* argues that the most important component of food sovereignty is autonomous food production and that the people themselves should define what they eat. But in Mexico, governments, corporations and the media have jointly promoted a costly campaign to boost consumer habits that, under the cover of modernisation, have been systematically destroying the food preferences of Mexicans.

NAFTA and other agreements that load the dice to favour corporations have shifted the Mexican food systems and dietary patterns away from fresh foods made into meals towards highly processed products mostly made ready-to-consume, with catastrophic effects on the health and development most of all of children.

Mexico can be rescued from its devastating rates of obesity and epidemics of diabetes and other diseases, only by complete overhaul of its catastrophic trade and investment polices. A successful programme of reform must include adequate sustained support for the country's small farmers.

A far more complex and radical approach is required than the sugar tax and the 'Hunger Crusade'. This will amount to a political and social revolution. Public policies and actions must confront the octopus of processed food and drink products, and chop off its tentacles that now reach into practically all urban spaces and are fast spreading through the countryside.

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Access the full document in the form of a Grain report, with references, here
Access the Grain brochure here

Herrera R. Mexico. 'Free trade' causes misery and diabesity. [The Food System] [*Feedback*] *World Nutrition May 2015,* ***6,*** *5, 424-429*

Editor's note. This account from Grain is supported by the report on Changing Food Systems and Inequality from Duke University Center on Globalization, Governance and Competiveness, itself supported by Oxfam and the EC. It includes case studies of BRICS countries and Mexico (aided by El Barzón) all showing the same pattern of transnational voracity and government compliance.



WN *Hot stuff*

A tale of two puddings. In praise of real food

Access December 2012 The Food System position paper here
Access April 2015 Geoffrey Cannon in praise of black pudding here



Ancient hand-made black blood pudding as celebrated in WN last month (left), yes ! Modern ultra-processed Jell-O black 'chocolate' pudding as celebrated by corporate shareholders (right), no !

Sean Lucan writes :

I devoured Geoffrey Cannon's scrumptious commentary on dietary guidelines in last month's *WN* (1). He praises a British breakfast of black pudding (above left),an ancient food made from oats, onion, herbs, and, oh yes, pig's blood. Black pudding is not to be confused with another dark pudding we have in the US, an ultra-processed 'chocolate' product, Jell-O being the iconic brand (above right).

Ancient black pudding is real sustenance. It is made with whole foods from nature. Modern Jell-O pudding is an artificial formulation. It is made with synthetic substances from laboratories. Black pudding comes from living botanical plants, and the animals that eat them. Jell-O pudding comes from industrial processing plants, and the corporations that design them. Foods like black pudding support health. Products like Jell-O pudding support cravings. Foods like black pudding are made from ingredients your grandmother would recognise as food. Products like today's Jell-O pudding come from ingredients unknown to your grandmother.

The difference between black pudding and Jell-O pudding is emblematic of 'the big issue with food, nutrition and health' today (1). That issue – I agree 100 per cent – is food processing, or more precisely ultra-processing. Processing as modification of real food is not necessarily a bad thing (and may be essential or desirable) when it consists say of washing, peeling, or slicing. Such processing is minimal, leaving food essentially intact and health benefits unaltered. Conversely, the ultra-processing used to create contrived products is necessarily a bad thing. Take 'fruit' drinks : if made from any real fruit at all, once fibre is removed and/or sugars,

colours, flavours,and preservatives are added,such products bear little resemblance to any products of nature.All that is real are the implications for health.

Personal health vs.corporate wealth

Ultra-processed products provide little sustenance for consumers but provide regular customers for companies. Manufacturers engineer products to be habit-forming (2). Geoffrey Cannon finds 'black pudding is delicious. But it does not induce cravings'. Jell-O pudding is fomulated to make consumers want more.

But what about reformulation of ultra-processed products in the name of health? Jell-O pudding, for instance, comes in a variety purged of unwanted fat. 'Fat-free' Jell-O pudding was born out of a scientific consensus that dietary fat is bad. In the context of fat phobia, manufacturers reformulated their products, to reduce fats and oils. The new products (now higher in refined starches and sugars) flew off of shelves. Corporate profits grew. So did waistlines and epidemics of diet-related diseases. Dietary-fat obsession was a public health disaster. Yet there are still professionals today who cling to the notion that dietary fat is bad and low-fat items are good, without any nuance or regard for libraries of contradictory evidence.

Geoffrey Cannon quotes Christopher Hitchens, who also offers wisdom that applies here: 'Religion poisons everything'. Blind acceptance of dietary dogma in the face of overwhelming opposing data is antithetical to science and detrimental to public health. As a colleague and I discuss in a commentary (3) praised as 'tightly argued, elegant and lucid' (4), fat is not the enemy, and many high-fat foods (such as nuts, olive oil, and fatty fish) and higher-fat diets (such as the Mediterranean diet) consistently demonstrate benefit for weight, health, and mortality.

Industrial ingredients vs. real foods and meals

But what about calories? Geoffrey Cannon quotes Albert Einstein in his piece and I will do so here as well: 'Not everything that can be counted counts'. It is a mistake to focus on food calories or food constituents. Health and well-being relate to foods and food combinations. and to meals, overall dietary patterns, and broader contexts such as food shopping, home cooking, and meal sharing.

Single-nutrient/single-component/single-culprit focus is misleading. It benefits ony the food processing industry ('Fat is bad? Try our fat-free version'. 'Salt no good? You'll love our low-sodium variety'). But reshuffling unhealthy garbage still results in unhealthy garbage. Reformulated ultra-processed products may be as bad or worse than their original versions (e.g.,now fat-free but full of refined starch; now low-sodium but loaded with added sugars, and so on). Part of the harm of ultra-processed products is habituation of taste buds to artificial ingredients, and induced cravings for items that incite neuro-hormonal/metabolic dysfunction (4). Another harm is supporting food systems designed around commodity constituents and factory methods. The definition of 'ultra-processed' could be extended to include not only the extreme manipulation and component re-assortment ofedibles, but also the caged confinement and unnatural feeding of animals.

Contrary to food industry objections to sustainability issues raised in the report by the 2015 US Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee (5), environmental health and public health are inextricably linked. Animal welfare directly relates to broader welfare of people and the planet (6). As colleagues and I propose in a paper on food myths and dietary advice in clinical practice (7):

> The theme for healthy eating focuses on foods, not food constituents: limit ultra-processed foods and eat more whole foods (or minimally processed foods), generally in a form that is as close to what occurs in nature as possible (e.g., organic plants and wild-caught or pastured animals raised on their natural diets). The healthiest food [real food] comes from farms, not factories or factory farms.

So bring on the black pudding (provided the pig that gave its blood roamed wild or was raised humanely). But focus more on the oats, onions, herbs, and other lower-resource plant foods that contribute to this ancient delight. Leave Jell-O pudding on the shelf (it probably never 'goes bad'; then again, it never really was good). Enjoy real food – preferably procured, prepared, and shared with those you love – and you are likely to enjoy longer life and better health than any calorie/fat/ healthful-component-X/unhealthful-component-Y-obsessor.

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Lucan SC. A tale of two black puddings. In praise of real food. Invited comment [Hot stuff] [*Feedback*] *World Nutrition May 2015, **6,** 5, 430-432*



***WN** The Food System*

Needed, food classification that works

Access December 2012 The Food System position paper 2 here
Access November 2014 Int Journal of Obesity David Allison et al paper here
Access November 2014 Dietary Guidelines for the Brazilian Population here
Access April 2015 Update 'Lies, damn lies…' on dietary surveys here
Access April 2015 Anthony Fardet on nutrients, nutrition and nourishment here
Access this issue Raj Patel, Amit Srivastava on ultra-processing in India here

Anthony Fardet writes:

The *Update* section of *WN* in April included an item on dietary surveys ('Lies, damn lies', accessible above), stating that data derived from food frequency questionnaires are bound to be inaccurate. Here are three statements made in the item:

> Take dietary surveys, the basis for recommendations on which public policies on food, nutrition and health are based. Most of these are in the form either of 'food frequency questionnaires' posted to people, asking them what they ate, or '24-hour recalls', in which people are asked by telephone or interview what they ate. Both methods enable surveys of many thousands of people, which improve the chances of getting statistically significant results. Most leading nutritional epidemiologists, while accepting that these methods are rather crude, say that errors of recollection tend to cancel one another out and that the results are accurate.
>
> But errors from self-reporting of energy intake are not likely to be random. The more worried people are about their habits and weight, the more they will – accidentally or on purpose – under-report consumption of food or products they believe to be fattening, like confectionery, sugared drinks or fast food, or which they believe to be bad for them, like alcoholic drinks, or which they eat compulsively or secretly, like chocolate".
>
> The issue is not just energy intake. As stated a decade and more ago by some distinguished rebels, food frequency questionnaires are liable to be grossly inaccurate records of diets in general, and can produce results on critical public health issues such as diet and cancer, strikingly different from results obtained by intensive measurements of smaller numbers of people involving biomarkers.

This is not all!

I agree with all this, and wish to go further and also to propose a solution. There is another main concern, surely fundamental, about such data collection. Food is now classified into 'classic food groups' such as cereals, vegetables, fruits, meat, dairy, fish, and so on, classified botanically or as groups of species. The original idea behind this grouping was that people usually ate whole or minimally processed foods as such, or else meals made from such foods, and that the 'classic' groups could be roughly

classified as sources of specific nutrients – vegetables and fruits for vitamins, meats, fish and dairy for protein, cereals for carbohydrates, for instance.

But such classification derives from a paradigm which is no longer useful. The increased prevalence of obesity and diet-related chronic diseases is not and never was driven by imbalances between food groups as such. It is largely driven by increased consumption of ultra-processed, refined and recombined food products, made from isolated culinary ingredients, themselves coming from original raw complex foods. (A full account is given in *The Food System* position paper published in *WN* in December 2012, accessible above).

The big issue is processing

The significance of ultra-processing cannot be discerned by dividing foods into the 'classic' groups. Within any of these groups there are very different foods and products with very different health potential. Thus, the health potentials of semi-skimmed milk versus cheese or sweetened yoghurt are very different, as is the frequency of their consumption. The same is true for unsweetened home-made muesli versus sugared breakfast cereals – and so on.

Clustering foods, food products and ultra-processed products within groups according to their botanical origin or types of species cannot be a basis for solid and strong epidemiological evidence. Classification used in dietary surveys need to be according to the nature, purpose and extent of processing, as recently realised in the new Brazilian *Dietary Guidelines* (English version accessible above). The shortcomings of food frequency questionnaires outlined in *WN* last month and quoted above, plus an obsolete classification of foods into the 'classic groups', make current epidemiological findings fragile.

I therefore propose that as soon as possible, classification used as a basis for dietary surveys be based in the nature, purpose and degree of processing. This will be a momentous development.

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Fardet A. Needed, food classification that works [The Food System] [Feedback] World Nutrition May 2015, ***6,*** *5, 433-434*

Editor's comment. We agree! Momentous, yes, and now we think quite likely to occur. The NOVA food classification system used as a basis for the Brazilian dietary guidelines, also set out in a large number of international journals, is now specified in a publication from the UN Food and Agriculture Organization in the final stages of preparation. WN will be publishing a full account later this year. This is we think an idea whose time has come.



WN *Development. Hot Stuff*

Safety nets, SUN and MOON

Access April 2015 Feedback George Kent on trade here
Access April 2015 Feedback Shamim HayderTalukder on vitamin A here



Claudio Schuftan writes:

Two letters in last month's Feedback section, George Kent on 'Trade – free for whom?' and Shamim Hayder Talukder on 'The MOON also rises', need discussion.

In George Kent's very good letter what struck me only was his last paragraph:

> It is possible to add elements to trade agreements to protect the vulnerable. Rather than relying on 'free trade' to improve living conditions for the poor, trade agreements could include measures such as social safety nets that protect and improve their living conditions. Those who think that safety nets for the poor will not be needed should have no hesitation about providing them, as a kind of insurance. Packaging trade proposals together with protective programmes of this kind might increase the likelihood that poor communities would support them.

'Safety nets' perpetuate poverty

'Safety nets' are insufficient and unacceptable, particularly now with growing global multi-centric economic crises. Safety nets eventually break and have not worked for the poorest and most marginalised groups. Poverty and equity issues must be faced frontally. Also, impoverished communities have the internationally sanctioned right to be included in discussions and policy-making on issues of societal disparity reduction, rather than continuing to be treated as objects of charity and handouts.

In short, 'safety nets' are bad policy. Support of individual vulnerable groups basically means: 'Go for the worst cases, fix them, and improve the statistics'. Rather, what is needed are permanent changes to avoid the recurrence of the same problems. It is

not by chance that 'safety nets' are a main option proposed by the World Bank and other major funding agencies.

Moreover, such schemes are often put in place insincerely, as political manoeuvres to make predatory 'market-based' policies more 'palatable'. Individual targeting has never been made to work equitably. Furthermore, providing packages of services to target groups are wastefully expensive. Targeting creates a 'mirage of equity' that leaves the perennial determinants of impoverishment untouched.

Additionally, this illusion of promoting equity stigmatises impoverished communities, creating second-class citizens who can be manipulated. Waiver schemes for those rendered poor have proven mostly catastrophic. Targeting is not a substitute for a more redistributive public policy. Safety net interventions are a last emergency measure only. As used, targeting policies tacitly blame the most vulnerable for being where they are, and are a technique to attenuating social unrest. Altogether, they are part of the problem. So on this point I see things differently from my respected colleague George Kent (1).

The SUN and the MOON

Shamim Talukder's letter includes what is for me a new definition of nutrition-sensitive interventions (2) as

> Interventions or programmes that address the underlying determinants of foetal and child nutrition and development – food security; adequate care-giving resources at the maternal, household and community levels; and access to health services and a safe an hygienic environment – and incorporate specific nutrition goals and actions.

He objects to this definition, using the example of the SUN Initiative. I agree with him fully. In the hope that I am not quoting him out of context or paraphrasing him incorrectly, I have extracted the following:

> The Scaling Up Nutrition initiative has a part to play in [applying this definition] as do other UN programmes. SUN states that it is an inclusive and country-led movement. So it should have potential to reduce malnutrition. After all, it has top-level backing, committed political leadership, apparently vibrant civil society support, and partnerships with donors and groups linked with big business such as the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition.

A reality check is needed here though. The overall governance proposed by SUN is weak, at best. The nutrition programmes proposed may include, as partners, people and entities in the business of ultra-processed products, otherwise known as junk food. The risk? That priority will often be given to commercial products that ignore the impact on chronic diseases and impede sustainable locally grown policies.

To be sustainable, nutrition-sensitive development goals must focus on human development, not just business development, and must consider environmental,

social and economic issues. Shamim Talukder asks for the MOON, a needed and timely movement that could eclipse the SUN.

He calls for genuinely nutrition-sensitive interventions. These need to ensure appropriate distribution of resources measures, and must include initiatives that may be overlooked or neglected by SUN, such as – to mention only one – degradation of food supplies with oily fatty salty ultra-processed junk products. He rightly denounces SUN policies that require a top-down imposed system. He adds that there is need to overcome corporate-led nutrition interventions. This will involve recognising the nutrition-sensitive issues that are neglected by SUN attributable to the power and influence of its corporate partners. I applaud all he says. The MOON approach he proposes is an inspiration for a world yearning for nutrition equality, not a world of nutrition traders.

Political power-plays

I have an additional proposition. As defined and applied, nutrition-sensitive interventions are a clever response to the call by progressive public health nutritionists to tackle the commercial and deeply rooted and unfair social determinants of malnutrition. But, instead, it is the underlying power-play of politics that must be identified and confronted.

Corporate globalisation, including the unleashing of the crudest forms of greed, does not have a human face. It is a process we cannot wish away. 'Markets' enrich those with purchasing power or commodities or services to sell. Impoverished communities and nations have neither. The current brand of unregulated capitalism is morally unacceptable and economically inefficient. The SUN initiative is not helpful here. Its concept of nutrition-sensitive interventions risks influence by the inveterate enemies of public health nutrition and public goods as a whole. This can only deepen the present situation of global inequity, inequality and of unabated poverty and relentless paths to impoverishment.

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[*Feedback*] *World Nutrition May 2015, **6,** 5, 435-437*



WN *Big Food Watch*

Big Bill de-Cokes

Access April 2011 PLoS Medicine David Stuckler et al on Gates holdings here
Access December 2013 Mother Jones Alex Park et al on Gates holdings here

The Update team writes:

Some advance copies of last month's *WN* stated that the Gates Foundation holds around $US 2 billion shareholdings in Coca-Cola and McDonald's. This has been so, as detailed by David Stuckler and colleagues in *PLoS Medicine,* and by Alex Park and colleagues in *Mother Jones*, together with powerful graphics – access these above.

However, in February Gates announced that these shareholdings were being sold, despite Bill's own appetite for burgers and soda. A correction was made immediately. In April Nobel prizewinners pressed Bill to sell Gates shares in corporations that disrupt climate. So far no luck. But a Gates representative says that 'Bill is privately investing considerable time and resources in this effort and the breakthrough innovations needed'. So there is hope.

As readers will see, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation is featured in this issue of WN, on the cover, and in the commentary by Anne-Emanuelle Birn.

The Update team. Big Bill de-Cokes. [Big Food Watch] [Feedback]. World Nutrition May 2015, ***6,*** *5, 438*

Status

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How to respond

Feedback is convened by Maria Alvim. Please address letters for publication to wn.letters@gmail.com. Letters usually respond to or comment on contributions to *World Nutrition*. Usual length for main text of letters is between 350 and 1,000 words but they can be shorter or longer. Letters are edited for length and style, may be shortened or developed, and once edited are sent to the author for approval.