WN *Development*

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Building healthy global food systems



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Access April 2012 appreciations of Rio2012 conference here
Access May 2012 appreciations of Rio2012 conference here
Access September Oxford conference programme here
Access this issue Update BFW Straight Thinking initiative here
Access this issue Fabio Gomes et al on ICN2 Framework for Action here

Thiago Hérick de Sá and Diana Parra write:

This month the World Public Health Nutrition Association holds its second international conference, in Oxford, England. *The programme can be accessed here.* Its ambitious and challenging title and theme is *Building healthy global food systems: a new imperative for public health.*

The Association's first conference, *World Nutrition Rio 2012,* is still bright in the minds and hearts of its participants, for a number of reasons. One is that it was a beginning. Many of its topics, including those developed in workshop sessions, continue to be explored and developed into decisions and actions in Latin America and worldwide. Another is that friendships and networks nourished in Rio de Janeiro

have become stronger. Another is that the conference was funded and supported solely by its participants and by public funds. *Elsewhere in this issue of WN* we announce the launch of *Straight Thinking,* under the *Big Food Watch* banner, an initiative of which we – Diana and Thiago as the conveners – will encourage such independence. The Oxford conference is in the spirit of *Rio2012*.

This feature here is the first of three to consider the Oxford conference and its themes, for now and to guide future thinking, decisions and actions. Here, we have asked five members of the *WN* editorial team to address four questions, in the spirit of the charge specified by Association President Barrie Margetts in Box 1, below:

- What is a good food system?
- Why does sustainable development matter?
- What is your best hope from the Oxford conference?
- What recent experience of yours is relevant to the conference?

These questions will also be asked of Oxford participants, and results published next month, October; then of others associated with the second International Conference on Nutrition, to be published in November. Collectively the answers given will be our own contribution to international policies and actions in the next 15-20 years.

Box 1

Oxford: The vision and mission of the conference

Association President Barrie Margetts writes:

The vision of our conference is to review the status of diet-related ill health, determine the impact that existing global food systems have on health. It is then to explore policies that could effectively promote health and well-being and support global food systems which are environmentally, culturally and socially sustainable. The objectives of the conference are to:

- Characterise, discuss and agree what is meant by healthy diets and food systems.
- Identify the major global drivers that shape current global food systems.
- Explore how to put health and well-being first among the drivers of global food systems.
- Address this major global challenge by refocusing approaches to public health.
- Review initial political and policy successes, and examine options for a healthier future.

In creating this conference the Association has three aims. These are to:

- Move the agenda forward from *World Nutrition Rio2012*.
- Assert our responsibilities in global public health nutrition.
- Play a key role in building the foundations for healthy populations.

Healthy food systems are fundamental to global health and well being. Given the complexities that shape food supplies, consumers and governments alike are not able to resist and control many of the harmful forces that currently support and promote unhealthy diets. Concerted, collective, global public action is needed, to shape future food systems in the interests of the health and well-being of the planet and its people.

Jean-Claude Moubarac



What is a good food system?



Mexico. Freshly prepared and cooked food made up into delicious dishes and a whole meal. In parts of the world where it is normal for families to enjoy locally produced food, the food system is healthy

The proof of a food system is in its eating. That is, seeing what people eat and drink from day to day, in a family, village, city or country; and better still, sitting down with them. If the dominant system produces food made into meals of rich variety that are nourishing as well as nutritious, as above, it is good. If the dominant system produces products whose variety is more in their packaging and marketing than in what they contain, it is bad – and in both cases, for many different types of reason. Food systems are not natural. They are made by humans. We can always make them better. They are the reflection of our ideals, values and beliefs. Good food systems are ones that are fair: they benefit the whole society, not just powerful corporations.

Why does sustainable development matter?

Development that is not sustainable pushes the human species towards the brink of catastrophe. And not just us. The implications are vast. In this issue of *WN* my colleague Thiago Hérick de Sá is continuing to examine just what 'development'

means and needs to mean, in order to be sustainable. This challenges us to engage with politics, economics and philosophy. Of course, sustainability does not always rhymes with short-term profits, but we need to adopt a long-term vision otherwise our children's children will curse their great grand-parents!

What is your best hope from the Oxford conference?

That reason and good will triumph over personal interests. We are not far from reaching a consensus on how to best characterise and measure healthy diets. The seemingly distinct methods and approaches to nutrition are not incompatible, they are complementary. My hope for Oxford is that scholars strongly unite around the same mission, to contribute to building a healthier food system.

What recent experience of yours is relevant to the conference?

The marketing of ultra-processed products typically promotes compulsive overeating



`***With something so fun and tasty, kids and adults alike will be entertained each and every time, keeping them coming back for more.***`

http://www.corporate.nestle.ca/en/media/pressreleases/...treat-kids-will-go-bananas-over

Transnational corporations' global strategy is to displace freshly prepared meals with ready-to-consume ultra-processed products, from birth to death. This new global product above is a warning

This was written the day before I presented at the 17th International Congress of Food Science and Technology, held in Montréal. Above is one of my slides. There is plenty of food science and technology behind the deceptive product above. But to understand its significance needs sleuthing in the industry trade press and corporation annual reports, and knowledge of the brute force of capital, the seductive influence of marketing, and the psychology of children in today's world. *Sick Societies* is the title of the book by David Stuckler, present at Oxford. He is right. As Rudolf Virchow said, epidemic diseases are symptoms of sick societies.

Jean-Claude Moubarac, a WN assistant editor, is convenor for WN of The Food System
He is a post-doctoral research fellow at the University of Montréal

Isabela Sattamini



What is a good food system?



Amazonia, Brazil. Traditional fruits from the Brazilian North. We enjoy great variety of local foods that have solutions for many nutritional problems, considering all their different nutrients

We all – professionals and consumers, politicians or peasants – live with conflicting pressures. On the one hand, information on healthy food is more available, and people all over the world start to think – supporting their own traditional knowledge with evidence from science – about their food habits and how the market influences it. As consumers they act to protect their health, and as citizens they begin to demand action from government. On another hand, transnational food corporations use all sorts of techniques to confuse and deceive us all, in order to increase their profits and power.

The best food systems are filled at all stages and dimensions with culturally referenced food, locally produced, free of agro-toxins, like the fruits from Amazonia above, available for and affordable by all. Their agriculture includes all sorts of local bio-diverse elements, in balance with other species close to nature. All is valued and cared for by the people on and close to the land, and not owned by corporations.

Why does sustainable development matter?

Development for whom? Current dominant political and economic policies pretend to enrich the whole society, but in reality put more money into wealthy people's pockets, and so increase inequities. As conventionally used, the term 'sustainable development' seems to imply social and environmental inclusion. But in reality it assumes continuation of unsustainable growth in production and consumption.

I like Amartya Sen's concept of *Development as Freedom*. In his book with this title he says that expansion of freedom should be the main end and means of development. Freedoms include elementary capacities, such as ability to avoid hardships such as hunger, malnutrition, preventable morbidity and premature death, as well as the freedoms that should follow ability to read, write and calculate, and participate in political processes with confidence in freedom of expression.

The main obstacle to achieving the right to adequate food for all is the current policy that now dominates in the world. This indulges growth in money supplies and cossets corporations. So far, the concept of sustainable development has evaded addressing this basic fact. The solution requires a revolution in thinking about what 'development' really should mean, conceptually and in the ways we all live.

What is your best hope from the Oxford conference?

That it continues the work done by *World Nutrition Rio2012*, bringing together professionals, both academics and activists, committed to public health nutrition as a whole. The idea of impartial science must be deconstructed. In reality 'impartiality' so often means collaboration with the dominant power. Development, protection and creation of good food systems necessarily require big picture thinking. As two 'asks', I ask that the Oxford conference pledges to support regulation of ultra-processed products, and to protect local healthy food systems, both in theory and in reality.

What recent experience of yours is relevant to the conference?

I am currently researching regulation of propaganda directed at children, in Rio de Janeiro, in partnership with the University of Liverpool. When talking to the kids' parents about the project, I found that many of them were interested and engaged with the idea of regulating marketing to children. This was an empowering experience for me. The field might be more open, and we may have a bigger army and more allies, than we suppose.

Isabela Sattamini, an assistant editor of WN, is editor of Feedback
She works in the department of prevention at Brazil's National Cancer Institute

Fabio Gomes



What is a good food system?



Vila Velha, Espirito Santo, Brazil. Here is Moqueca Capixaba, the great dish of the state and the city where I grew up. Good food systems are embodied in great dishes and meals like this

A good food system is one in which great dishes like the *Moqueca Capixaba* which you see in the picture above, served accompanied with rice, and with *pirão*, the sauce made with the fish juices and manioc (cassava) flour, are part of the family life and shared culture of the people. Please let me explain. Vila Velha, my family city, is the place where food started to burn with passion in my heart. I was born in Rio de Janeiro, but spent a great part of my childhood and adolescence living in Vila Velha. This, once a little town, now belongs to the metropolitan region of has the state of Espírito Santo, located in the Southeast region of Brazil, surrounded by the states of Minas Gerais, Rio de Janeiro, Bahia and the great Atlantic Ocean.

Although Espírito Santo is known for innumerable beauties and delights, such as its coffee, its *Moqueca Capixaba* ('*capixaba*' simply means 'from Espírito Santo') is more than a culinary delight. With its preparation, it is part of the culture of these parts. The authentic dish is prepared in a special mud (earthenware) pot, designed by the potters of *Goiabeiras*. By mixing their sweat, their joy, the mud, and

pigments from the red mangrove tree, these women create unique, resistant and long lasting pots. The work of the *Goiabeiras* potters is recognised as 'an intangible cultural heritage' of Brazil. Yes, it is possible to make a *Moqueca Capixaba* in any earthenware pot, but cooked in a *Goiabeiras* mud pot it tastes intangibly better!

In the North-Eastern states of Brazil there are also fish stews called *moqueca*. But the *Moqueca Capixaba* is special. Besides its mud pot, its secret is its simplicity. You just need (very) fresh fish, coriander, chives, tomatoes, onions, garlic, salt, limes, and olive oil. The North-Eastern fish stews are 'richer' – they include pepper, eggs, potatoes, carrots, palm oil and/or coconut milk. They are good, but they are not the *Moqueca* I love. Try and judge for yourself.

A good food system produces ways of living and being, with food and meals enjoyed in company, celebrated in songs, paintings, and verse. Contributions to *Network*, the final page of *WN* every month, show this. And so once again here is some of the paean *Moqueca Capixaba* by Renata Bomfim from Espirito Santo, whose picture is beside mine above, with translation by Geoffrey Cannon:

She becomes hot so slowly,
(*Ela vai sendo aquecida, lenta e*)
gently, on a low flame,
(*delicadamente, em fogo brando.*)
At the table, the loved one,
(*Sobre a mesa, o namorado,*)
warmed and amorous, awaits.
(*temperado com amor, espera.*)

Daughter of black native earth,
(*Pretinha de barro, filha de indio*)
In your lap, the fruit of the sea
(*seu colo acolhe o fruto do mar*)
is bubbling now, heavy with aroma.
(*fervilhante, emana seu odor.*)
And all of us wait, eager.
(*Esperam-na todos, deleitantes.*)...

Now it is the loved one that
(*E o namorado vai sendo devorado,*)
is devoured, transubstantiated.
(*transubstanciação)*
With Holy Spirit in our mouths,
(*Espírito Santo no ceu da boca.*)
Moqueca capixaba is divine.
(*Divina moqueca capixaba!*)

Why does sustainable development matter?

May I respond simply by referring to my report on the civil society responses to the draft International Conference on Nutrition Framework for Action, in this issue of *WN*? *[Eds – yes you may, and here is the link]*

What is your best hope from the Oxford conference?

That like the previous *World Nutrition Rio2012* conference, it is a beginning. That like *Rio2012* its participants are dedicated to *knowledge-decision-action.* And following all that we in public health nutrition have learned since Rio, that we all come away in solidarity, knowing that in our work and lives we continue to do our best in the face of unique challenges and obstacles.

That everything we do makes some contribution to the human rights of impoverished people in Africa and Asia and also in our own countries, cities and communities. That we all commit to open our minds and hearts to learn in the new world in which we live now. That we rejoice in our duties and responsibilities. That we are prepared to put our careers on the line. That mentoring and inspiring young professionals is for us a sacred duty. And finally, when our grand-children, living in the world that comes to pass, listen to our story, that they are proud of us.

What recent experience of yours is relevant to the conference?

I bring to Oxford my experience of working side by side and shoulder to shoulder with the leaders of public interest organisations and social movements, to one great common end. This explains the energy evident in *Big Food Watch*, whose contributions have featured in *WN* since October last year. *BFW* is a collaborative network whose members have also featured in *WN* this year. Its work has emphasised what as a Latin American I knew in my blood and bones already. This is that great causes are identified and won by a whole range of organisations whose active and effective members are inspired by and learn from one another.

More specifically, I bring to Oxford my work in recent months and weeks with organisations such as *El Poder del Consumidor*, the International Baby Food Action Network, FIAN International, the People's Health Movement, and Brazilian citizen action organisations and movements, in Geneva, Rome, Mexico City, Monetvideo, Rio de Janeiro, Belém, and Brasília.

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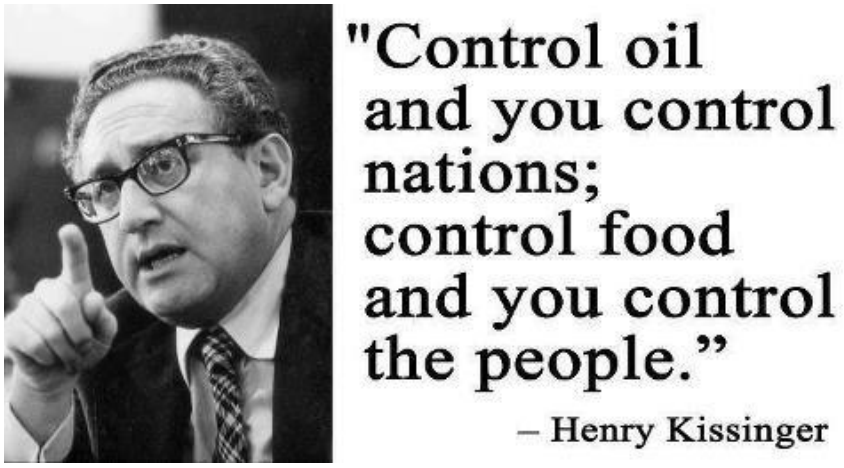
He is responsible for nutrition and prevention policy at the Brazilian National Cancer Institute

Claudio Schuftan



What is a good food system?



Rome, 1976. Then US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger pledged that by 2000 no child on earth would go to bed hungry. But he also had another strategy in mind, as stated above in 1970

'Food system'. The term is an application of systems analysis to the food chain, something already tried in the late 1970s. I have my doubts about its validity and relevance today. What is certainly wrong is any concept of a single food system. Think about this please. Focus on this concept depoliticises food and nutrition challenges, and also brings it out of the multiple cultural contexts in which it should be treated. Such an approach veers away from what matters much more, which is people's food sovereignty (1) and the right to nutrition. These are the real challenges for sustainability.

When articulated, the 'food system' focus typically includes nothing about empowerment of producers and consumers. It leaves out breastfeeding. It overlooks bio-diversity and the importance of balanced local diets. It tacitly condones the use of genetically modified crops. It has nothing to say about land-grabbing and unfair landholding. It usually is silent about the global negative ecological and economic impact of the prevailing agro-industrial agricultural production model. It apparently cares little (if any) about the protection of small scale food production and producers In general, it does not ask or respond to fundamental questions of what, how, why and for whom foods are produced.

Why does sustainable development matter?

Because what we are or should be thinking about here is the importance of culturally appropriate food systems as selected by the very people involved in them. Furthermore, sustainability depends on tackling the social, economic and political determinants of nutrition. The ideology behind focusing on any singular 'food system' ignores this.

What is your best hope from the Oxford conference?

First, I am glad that the conference speaks of food systems in plural. I hope this permeates the discussions. But I also hope that participants consider rejecting the depoliticisation of food and nutrition issues, and denouncing the mere lip service given to the principles, standards and practice of the human right to adequate nutrition. Denunciation is of course not enough, but it is a start!

Here are a few of quite a long list of issues to be faced and resolved at Oxford:

- Reckless advertising and marketing of ultra-processed food and drink products most of all to children.
- Neglect of ongoing food and nutrition needs during civil unrest and natural or man-made disasters – including famines.
- Intentional overemphasis on a medical approach to chronic diseases, as well as on blaming individual behaviour.
- Refusal to admit the impact and consequences of transnational market penetration, so as to take needed action.
- Avoidance of legislation designed to protect human rights, such as lack of regulations that protect women during pregnancy and lactation.
- Refusal to protect populations and responsible industry with laws that restrict or prohibit predatory corporate greed.

Name a recent experience you would like to inform the conference

Last November, on behalf of the People's Health Movement, I participated in a preparatory meeting for the UN International Conference on Nutrition being held this coming November. The meeting was held in Rome at the headquarters of the Food and Agriculture Organization. We were 'educated' by a presentation on 'the food system'. Slide after slide projected boxes and arrows and interpenetrating lines to show 'its complexity'. During the 'Q&A', I asked the presenter how the food system protagonists (producers and consumers) were to understand that complex net of relationships if they were to play the role expected from them. He said that he did not understand my question and then passed on. Let's be sure that Oxford is not like that in any way.

Add anything else as you wish



Seattle, 1999. Some of the great issues of food sovereignty and security and the rights of producers and consumers are not just for study. They are, like this or not, being faced and fought for on the streets

Our struggle requires a deep commitment to justice, fairness and human rights. In our current world, producers and consumers of food are by right, claim holders. So, what cannot be forgotten when discussing food systems is precisely the role of these as de-facto claim holders. A deliberate focus on empowering them – with a special focus on women and activists in this field – is thus needed. Here, allow me to mention the role of *World Nutrition* in the last two years. The journal has become a unique resource for all of us struggling to discern the forces at play, including those of us dedicated to fulfilment of the true vision, mission and work of public health nutrition

Note

1 Food sovereignty is a precondition of food security. It rejects food systems in which decisions are made solely by corporate entities and others removed from local food systems. It includes the human right to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through socially just and ecologically sensitive methods. It entails peoples' right to define their own food, agriculture, livestock and fisheries systems. These freedoms to produce and consume nourishing food are the key to food sovereignty. Hunger, malnutrition, and associated outcomes are not equally distributed across social groups or indeed nations, for not all people have such freedoms. This relates food sovereignty to empowerment so that people, communities and populations achieve control over their lives, gain a voice, become real citizens, and influence and participate in decision-making processes.

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He is a physician, and a member of the People's Health Movement global steering committee

Geoffrey Cannon



What is a good food system?



Tuscany. Over two thousand years of cultivation have shaped landscapes that are therefore beautiful. They manifest sustained respectful balance between the physical, living and human environments

There is no such thing as one good food system. The nature, glory and value of good food systems is in their infinite variety. But yes, all good food systems do have qualities in common. They generate food that is biologically healthy, in the sense of promoting good health and well-being and protecting against disorders and diseases. They also enhance the full experience and enjoyment of life on earth. Good food systems work well in social, economic, environmental and other relevant contexts.

These dimensions have many aspects. Here are just a few examples. The social aspect includes commensality and conviviality. This protects cultures in which freshly prepared meals valued and enjoyed in company are a normal and central part of life, within the family and with friends and colleagues. The economic aspect includes strengthening and development of the greatest variety of enterprises concerned with the production, distribution and provision of food and meals, which in particular respect and protect the skills and employment of co-operative, small and family farmers, fishers and traders. The environmental aspect includes harmony with

climate and terrain, the preservation and enrichment or replenishment of land, water and energy resources, minimum toxicity and waste, and the creation and maintenance of harmonious and beautiful landscapes.

Meditating on these qualities may make us realise how far and fast the dominant industrial systems now have wrecked what is needed to live well. Perhaps the greatest idiocy perpetrated by humans in the history of our species, other than obsession with war, has been the destruction of sustained quality in agriculture whose main product is food, and its replacement by industrialised quantity whose main product is money. The dominant systems now are obviously a menace to health. This is what pandemic obesity tells us. They are a menace to life of the human species and the whole living world. We are confronted by a great revenge of nature on our species.

Why does sustainable development matter?

Anything that is sustainable can be maintained indefinitely. The current conventional concept of 'development' is centred on the constant growth of getting and spending – more money, more activity, more use of resources. In which case, 'sustainable development' is a contradiction in terms. What therefore is needed is a revolution in ideology, involving a whole new concept of development that is not based on more quantity – more and more money or other material things – but on more quality. This necessarily involves less use of money and other material resources, and attention in all public and personal policies and actions to treading lightly on the planet. To be sustainable, human development needs to be of our personal, familial, social, national and universal physical, mental, emotional and spiritual qualities, all together. This involves recognition that ancient and more recent pre-industrial communities, civilisations and populations in fundamental respects have been, and are, wiser in their ways of living and being than we are now.

What is your best hope for the Oxford conference?

That many of the presentations and discussions will show what good food systems and real sustained development are all about, not by mere talk, but by example. One of the posters at the conference is being shown by Stefania Vezzosi of Pistoia, near Florence in Tuscany, whose picture is above, next to mine. Her project is about encouraging and assessing the value and impact of healthy school meals in the town of Quarrata in this province, whose countryside is shown in the picture above. In doing so, she and her colleagues are respecting and sustaining a tradition of cultivation, production, supply, sale, and preparation of food and meals, that has a continuous history of 2,500 years dating back to the Etruscans. This explains the beauty of the landscape, as shown in the picture above sent by Stefania. *WN* will be publishing the full story soon.

What recent experience of yours is relevant to the conference?

In August, breaking bread at lunch with Michael Pollan in company with Carlos Monteiro and members of *The Food System* team based at the University of São Paulo. Michael was promoting the Brazilian launch of his book *Cooked.* He experienced what we felt, that Brazil is hungry for him and what he represents

In his articles notably for *The New York Times* and his books, Michael integrates the natural world, agriculture, the balance of life and rhythm of the seasons, elemental understanding of earth, water, air and fire, gastronomy and good fellowship. Also included, as he says in *Cooked,* is understanding that the production, acquisition, preparation and enjoyment of good food has always been a central and fundamental part of what it means – or should mean – to be fully human.

As an Oxford undergraduate, at a college close to the conference venue, I will savour the sense of place (I know some best places!). Colleagues are invited to join me.

Add anything else as you wish

Thank you, Thiago, Diana, Jean-Claude, Fabio, Claudio and Enrique, Barrie and convenors of the Oxford conference, and other members of the *WN* editorial team.

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Status

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