



WN *Development*

World Nutrition Volume 5, Number 9, September 2014

Journal of the World Public Health Nutrition Association
Published monthly at www.wphna.org/worldnutrition/

UN food and nutrition strategy **Crisis of confidence - 2**



Fabio Gomes

External Affairs Secretary, World Public Health Nutrition Association

Email: Fabiodasilvagomes@gmail.com

With contributions from

Alejandro Calvillo and Xaviera Cabada: *El Poder Del Consumidor*

Lida Llotska: International Baby Milk Action Network

Flavio Valente: FIAN International

[Access February 2013 The Lancet Profits and Pandemics here](#)

[Access June 2014 WPHNA response to ICN2 Rome Declaration here](#)

[Access June 2014 Update on G77-133 Summit here](#)

[Access June 2014 G77-133 Declaration of Santa Cruz here](#)

[Access June 2014 Jacoby et al Farming in the Americas report here](#)

[Access July-August Fabio Gomes et al on ICN2 here](#)

[Access August 2014 ICN2 draft Framework For Action here](#)

[Access August 2014 WPHNA response to ICN2 draft FFA here](#)

[Access August 2014 El Poder del Consumidor response to ICN2 draft FFA here](#)

[Access August 2014 IBFAN response to ICN2 draft FFA here](#)

[Access August 2014 FIAN International response to ICN2 draft FFA here](#)

Introduction

Fabio Gomes states: I write here in my capacity as the World Public Health Nutrition Association external affairs secretary, and as such responsible for liaison with other bodies, at the invitation of the WN editor and editorial team.

The UN International Conference on Nutrition to be held on 19-21 November is the second so identified. The first was held in 1992. The political outcome document of ICN2 is meant to set global agenda on agriculture, food and nutrition policy and practice certainly for two decades, beyond 2030. The formal process of ICN2 includes consultation with industry, known as ‘the private sector’, and with non-governmental organisations, sometimes known as ‘the public sector’. All bodies outside government (including the UN system) are now being grouped together as ‘non-state actors’, notwithstanding the obvious conflicts of interest notably between transnational food and drink corporations whose products are unhealthy, and public interest organisations.

This *WN* contribution marks the third stage of consultation between the officials in the UN Food and Agriculture Organization responsible for the administration of ICN2, and civil society organisations. In the first two stages comments were invited to drafts of *The Rome Declaration*, whose purpose is indicate general principles. For this stage here, comments have been invited on the [Framework for Action](#), whose purpose is to be more concrete in making policy and action recommendations designed to be accepted and then implemented by member states.

The most substantial comments made at all stages so far have come from representatives of large international or national civil society organisations. It seems that no comments have been received from nutrition societies, other than the World Public Health Nutrition Association. Extracts from four substantial comments are included below.

They and other submissions are similar in that the express varying degrees of concern ranging from disappointment to denunciation. The overall concern is what is seen as an inadequate draft, reflecting lack of capacity and avoidance of uncomfortable truths. In sum, the Framework is radically criticised as not addressing the political and economic drivers of agriculture, food and nutrition policies and practices in the world now. The strongest criticism comes from organisations that represent the interests of vulnerable populations and groups living in poverty, whose basic need is means to become sufficiently empowered and resourced, so that they can look after themselves. Instead, the Framework largely perpetuates the assumption that impoverished and otherwise disadvantaged population need aid in the form of money, goods or interventions of types that by their nature are not sustainable or, worse, mystify or invalidate the people they are supposed to help. Edited extracts from four comments follow.

World Public Health Nutrition Association



Fabio Gomes, for World Public Health Nutrition Association

Work on ICN2 has a practical context. We recognise that this participatory process, not used for the 1992 Conference, imposes an additional load on the UN agency secretariats. This response is in a spirit of sympathy and solidarity. We also recognise other strains stressing the UN system. Relevant UN agencies need much more unrestricted funding, absolutely and relatively, from member states, in order to fulfil their mandates, to serve member states and the public interest, and to protect and preserve sustainable agriculture, food and health systems.

ICN2 needs to be positioned as within a very broad context of knowledge, policy and action. We are now in a new era, commonly termed the Anthropocene. We emphatically support first, the commitment of the UN Food and Agriculture Organization to family farming, which will and must remain fundamental, and second, the commitment of the World Health Organization, frequently specified by Director-General Margaret Chan, to universal primary health care.

What people eat and the effect of diets on personal health, and of dietary patterns on population health, are now well known to have environmental, economic, political, social and cultural as well as behavioural and biological determinants. These can be grasped only by use of systems methods. The linked financial, fuel and food crises are symptoms of world disorder that can be addressed only at the very highest level. Climate change has now been identified by the President of the World Bank as potentially profoundly disruptive of food systems and population health, so much so as to be a cause of wars. The deliberations and outcomes of ICN2 will make a real and lasting difference for the better if, and only if, they focus on the basic and underlying causes of disease, health and well-being in the whole sense of these terms.

We appreciate that our overstretched colleagues in the UN system who are working on ICN2, together with many member state representatives especially from the more vulnerable regions, know all this. We pledge to give the ICN2 process and its outcomes all the support we can.

General comments

The main ICN2 input and output documents should include explicit reference to and citation of other documents on which ICN2 has been built, or that are relevant to its

work. This is of course normal in UN processes. Two recent examples are the May 2014 publication on [Family Farming, Food Security, Nutrition and Public Health in the Americas](#), prepared by UN agency colleagues; and the June 2014 [Santa Cruz Declaration For a New World Order for Living Well](#) of the G77 group of member states (now 133, + China).

Of the statements and recommendations made in comments seen so far, we wish to give broad support to four that have, as here, been submitted by named people on behalf of international organisations. These include that by Corinna Hawkes, on behalf of World Cancer Research Fund International and the NCD Alliance, on achieving an effective process. They also include those by Xaviera Cabada on behalf of *El Poder del Consumidor*, Lida Llotska on behalf of the [International Baby Food Action Network](#), and Flavio Valente on behalf of FIAN [International](#).

We basically agree with their comments on the broad issues that are neglected in or missing from the *Framework For Action* draft. We also agree that the draft is still not in a state where it is sensible to propose drafting changes and adjustments. Its general approach requires new thinking, much of which has now been proposed.

Box 1

Issues missing or neglected in the draft Framework for Action

- The structural determinants of states of population health, and the realisation that epidemic diseases are symptoms of sick societies.
- The need to enable impoverished populations to determine their own ways of being and living and to gain sustained agriculture and food security.
- The imperative need in all normal situations for extended exclusive breastfeeding followed by freshly prepared culturally appropriate food and meals
- The devastating impact of the penetration by transnational food and drink product corporations of middle and low income countries in the global South.

These and other statements made in these three documents are amply supported, not seriously contested, and need emphasis. On the issue of transnational corporations, we agree with the position reached in a [relevant February 2013 Lancet paper](#) in its *Non-Communicable Diseases* series. To include such powerful industries, whose interests directly conflict with those of public health, in any form of policy planning (as distinct from implementation) is absurd.

In addition, we propose that all the main ICN2 input and output documents need to be introduced by a short set of governing and guiding principles which set out the conceptual and ethical framework of ICN2 and in effect of all other high-level meetings whose intention is to preserve and protect agriculture, food, nutrition and health systems. If this recommendation is accepted we will propose some principles, one of which certainly is that concerning the human right to adequate and nourishing food.

El Poder del Consumidor



*Alejandro Calvillo, for El Poder del Consumidor, Mexico
Comments submitted by Xaviera Cabada*

El Poder del Consumidor recognises the efforts made for this document and highlights the great importance for civil society, academia and experts to comment on it.

- The Framework For Action overall does not include the human rights approach in the different proposed actions nor in the different subjects established.
- There are strong inconsistencies between the background and justification given in each point with the actions proposed. The actions are very limited and broad.
- The private sector is given much interaction and space in ‘food systems’, when it has been a key element diminishing the food systems of the world.
- Conflict of interest is poorly mentioned. Accountability mechanisms stay broad and unknown.
- Proposals for ‘food systems’ are not based on small and medium agriculture, but on ‘bio-fortification’.
- Biodiversity needs to be mentioned as a priority. A system of protection of native seeds and origin centres needs to be established.
- Violations of human rights through unethical procedures are not mentioned at all.
- Sovereignty is not mentioned at all. This is essential to combat malnutrition.
- Full recommendation for breastfeeding is only mentioned once and not in the proposed actions. The full recommendation needs to be promoted and protected.
- Proposals for healthy diets are very broad, not concrete. A Convention Framework with global recommendations is needed, as it was with tobacco.
- The mechanisms for free access to drinking water are not specified, leaving this open to industry exploitation, instead of creating mechanisms for governments.
- Twelve official documents are mentioned in the background and justification, but none are mentioned in the priority actions, except for breastfeeding.
- The International Code for Marketing of Breast-milk substitutes is not mentioned as a priority action to implement.
- The background mentions very broadly the need to integrate the private sector with private-public partnerships, but does not make the same emphasis for academia, scientific public interest bodies or public interest civil society.
- Actions on access to water and sanitation needs to establish the mechanisms and the need for such mechanisms to be without conflict of interest.

- References to breastfeeding need to specify the whole WHO recommendations, including introduction of safe nutritious foods, and continuation of breastfeeding until 2 years or beyond.

International Baby Food Action Network



Lida Llotska, for International Baby Food Action Network

We regret the fact that, though emphasised in the opening paragraphs of the Rome Declaration on Nutrition, the right to adequate food is not mentioned in the Framework for Action. It should be at the core of this document, which should be based on the human rights framework 'Respect, Protect and Fulfil'. We welcome breastfeeding promotion and support being a priority. But the Framework:

- Calls for protection and promotion of exclusive breastfeeding for the first 6 months. But it forgets to mention continued breastfeeding up to 2 years or more.
- Refers to the implementation of the Global Strategy on Infant and Young Child Feeding as a priority action. This calls for full implementation of the International Code for Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes. So the Framework should not only mention the Code as a 'key global instrument' and as a 'tool to help Member States' but also call for its full implementation and enforcement at country level.
- Should recall the obligation of private companies to comply with the Code in all contexts, as outlined in the CRC General Comment No. 15.

We are concerned by the repeated call for increased participation of the private sector at all levels, while there is virtually no mention throughout the document of the necessity of safeguards against potential conflicts of interests (with the exception of page 5). The private sector, in particular transnational corporations, is and will remain profit-driven. Lack of efficient and transparent safeguards against potential conflicts of interests risks achievement of the right to adequate food and the fundamental right to be free from all forms of malnutrition.

The involvement and role of corporations should be very clearly defined to protect policy setting and ensure clarity. There is no benefit and little relevance in setting up 'consultations' with the private sector. These merely generate 'opinions' designed to transfer power to the corporations that are undermining food security, increasing opportunities for inappropriate corporate involvement.

The large majority of the world's food is grown and harvested by small farmers, fisher folk etc, not transnational corporations who tend to dominate UN meetings and standard setting and seek an ever expanding role. ICN2 should encourage governments to provide support small farmers, and thus increase consumption of healthier food and protect valuable food cultures and skills which are fast being lost.

A clear call for implementation and enforcement of effective marketing regulations on unhealthy foods and drinks is needed. These have a heavy impact on the burden of malnutrition and thus on health.

FIAN International



Flavio Valente, for FIAN International

Past and existing strategies, as reflected in the draft Framework, do not deal adequately with structural causes of hunger and malnutrition. They are not based on the human rights framework. They do not promote and protect the right to adequate food and nutrition as a human right. Moreover:

- They are fragmented in dealing with access to productive resources, social exclusion, poverty, the different models of production and access to adequate diet, and the needed public services to guarantee adequate nutrition.
- They are fragmented in dealing with the issue of wealth, income and access to adequate diet and the needed public services to guarantee adequate nutrition.
- They do not regulate the activities of transnational corporations and other business enterprises that abuse and contribute to violations of the human right to adequate food and nutrition and related rights.
- They are fragmented in dealing with food and nutrition, which are inextricably linked. The human right to adequate food is only fully realised when people achieve the highest level of nutritional well-being possible.
- Examples of fragmentation are the totally separate national and global governance structures for food security and nutrition; the lack of discussion of the negative impact of the hegemonic agro-industrial model of production on working conditions, destruction of livelihoods, environment, biodiversity, climate change, food quality, nutrition, and so on.
- They are fragmented in dealing with women's rights and mothers' and children's rights. There is need to combat violence and discrimination against girls and women, from birth, as a major measure to promote girls' and women's nutrition,

autonomy and human dignity as a prerequisite for maternal and children's rights, including the informed right of women to sexual and reproductive rights and to breastfeed; and in consequence reduce maternal malnutrition, low birth weight, stunting, and so on.

- They not guarantee full participation of public interest civil society organisations, social movements, or indigenous peoples, in discussions.

Breastfeeding promotion and protection must be a key priority. This should be clearly seen as a societal responsibility, in which the States have the obligation, at national and international level, to guarantee the enabling conditions for women to make the informed decision to breastfeed, and the family to support them in this social task, free from the undue pressure from mega-commercial interests.

This means the full promotion and protection of women's rights, including sexual and reproductive rights. Breastfeeding promotion and protection must be a key priority throughout the Framework, as must reduction of child marriage; reduction of violence; regulation of work related parental leave; and integration into law of the Code of conduct on the marketing of breast milk, among other things

- Women's rights must be fully respected, protected and fulfilled.
- Any new governance mechanism for nutrition at international level, must be well coordinated with the Committee on World Food Security, and with working relations with UN Human Rights System bodies.
- The same principles apply at national level. This mechanism should be government led with full participation of public interest civil society organisations.
- Categories such as 'stakeholders', or 'non-state actors', that level off power inequities as if they did not exist are unacceptable.
- Transnational corporations and business enterprises should not participate in policy discussion and decision in intergovernmental or governmental spaces

Status

Cite as: Gomes F, Calvillo A, Llotska L, Valente F. UN food and nutrition policy. Crisis of confidence 2. [Development]. *World Nutrition*, September 2014, **5, 9**, 749-756.

All issues of *WN* are obtainable at www.wphna.org. Readers may use the material in this contribution if *WN* is cited. Please address letters for publication to wn.letters@gmail.com. Letters should usually respond to or comment on contributions to *World Nutrition*.

World Nutrition commentaries are reviewed internally or by invitation. All contributions to *World Nutrition* are the copyright and responsibility of their authors. They are not the view or policy of the World Public Health Nutrition Association (the Association) or of any of its affiliated or associated bodies, unless this is explicitly stated.