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Development

Food, nutrition, health in the new world order

Access December 2012 Enrique Jacoby, Juan Rivera et al on Latin America here
Access June 2014 Enrique Jacoby et al on future of farming in the Americas here
Access this issue G77 June 2014 Santa Cruz Declaration here
Access this issue Fabio Gomes on International Conference on Nutrition here



The G77 Summit in Santa Cruz, Bolivia, of 133 nations, held on 14-15 June. The assembled heads of state and dignatories at the final session. The pledge of the summit is 'Creating a new world order to live well'. The 243-clause Santa Cruz Declaration, which will guide UN policy for world political and economic affairs as from 2015, stresses the need for food and nutrition security, for environmental 'protection, for family farming, for respect of traditional values, for an end to exploitation by rich nations of impoverished nations, and for the final elimination of extreme poverty

Fabio Gomes, with David Legge, reports:

A new world order dedicated to peace, security and ways of life that respect all living things and the planet may arise from the global South. This is the message of the cogent 243-clause *Santa Cruz Declaration,* agreed on 15 June at the Summit of the G77, now amounting to 133 nation states including practically all of Africa, Latin

America, and Asia. China, not a G77 member, nonetheless was represented at the Summit at high level. The South Korean UN secretary-general Ban Ki-Moon, an ardent environmentalist, gave an opening address. He knew that the G77 Summit leaders see the Declaration as the first draft of the UN Millennium Development Goals to be determined at the UN in New York in 2015, this time originated in the South. As well they may be, given that the 133 countries of the 'G77', originally founded 50 years ago, are now two-thirds of the 198 UN nation states.

Ban Ki-moon's commitment to the Summit went beyond normal diplomacy. His behaviour indicated that he knows that the future depends on the South. He made a point of mingling with the leaders of nations who are most critical of the current world disorder, as can be seen in the pictures below. He also celebrated his 70th birthday with his wife at a special party in his honour.

Current G77 president Evo Morales, one of the leaders of the democratic socialist bloc of Latin American nations, also gave a keynote address. His statements went beyond conventional politics, and stressed respect for nature, the planet, and traditional values personified by indigenous populations and exemplified by long-established ways of life centred on community and family values. He stated: 'We need to create a sustainable development paradigm of living well, in balance between human beings, and also in balance and harmony with our *Mother Earth*'. This, he said, must replace the current global North paradigm of exploitative capitalism.



The G77 Summit in Santa Cruz, Bolivia, of 133 nations, held on 14-15 June. Left to right above. UN secretary-general Ban Ki-moon states that the UN is counting on G77 leadership. Greeting Venezuelan president Nicholas Maduro. Pledging solidarity with G77 president, the Bolivian president Evo Morales. Below: blowing out the candles of his 70th birthday cake with his wife Yoo-soon Taek on his left. The final summit greeting from head of state and dignatories with Ban Ki-moon between Cuban president Raul Castro and Evo Morales, with Nicholas Maduro



The G77 Summit in Santa Cruz, Bolivia, of 133 nations, held on 14-15 June. Left to right above. Evo Morales brings Ban Ki-moon into the UN secretary-general's 70th birthday party. Delegates include in the front row the presidents of Cuba, Uruguay and Sri Lanka. Below left: with former Chinese health minister Chen Zhu, a vice-president of China's legislative body. Right: the garlanded presidents of Cuba, Bolivia, Ecuador and Venezuela in festive fraternal greeting. The G77 summit was a smash success, with great implications for the future of world governance

The entire *Santa Cruz Declaration is available here.* Some of its clauses directly concerning food systems and supplies, agriculture, dietary patterns, food and nutrition security, hunger, poverty, health and well-being, are in Box 1, below. The Declaration stresses the need for genuinely sustainable agriculture based on long-established methods as vital for food supplies, for good health and well-being, and for the protection of national, regional and local civilisation and culture.

The Declaration denounces political and economic systems that continue to exploit farmers and growers, and grab land and privatise public goods such as sources of energy, fuel and water. Comprehensive and cogent, it places population nutrition in the general context of good governance. Thus, clause 71 states: 'We emphasise the need to strengthen the capacity of our countries, especially through international cooperation, to safeguard and enhance our people's nutrition through the promotion of their productive cultural and environmental practices'. Clause 77 states 'We call for the creation of conditions for the development of economic opportunities for the benefit of small-scale and family farmers, peasant and indigenous peoples and communities, and the creation of options for connecting them with consumers, as part of the national strategies for the realisation of the right to food'.

The Declaration is not from civil society. It is from the representatives of most governments. The G133 now need to make sure that the Santa Cruz Declaration, suitably amended, is indeed the foundation of the new world order for all.

Box 1

The G77 Santa Cruz Declaration

Here are some of the 243 items in the G77 Santa Cruz Declaration of 15 June concerned specifically with world agriculture, food and nutrition. Many thanks to David Legge

67. We recall that food security and nutrition are essential elements for achieving sustainable development and express concern that developing countries are vulnerable to, among others, the adverse impacts of climate change, further threatening food security.

68. We reaffirm that hunger is a violation of human dignity and call for urgent measures to be taken at the national, regional and international levels to eliminate it. We also reaffirm the right of everyone to have access to safe and nutritious food in accordance with their right to adequate food and the fundamental right to be free from hunger, in order to develop and maintain their full physical and mental capacities. We also acknowledge that food security and nutrition are essential to sustainable development and have become a pressing global challenge and, in this regard, we further reaffirm our commitment to enhancing food security and access to adequate, safe and nutritious food for present and future generations in line with the Five Rome Principles for Sustainable Global Food Security, adopted on 16 November 2009, including for children under the age of 2, and through, as appropriate, national, regional and global food security and nutrition strategies.

69. We denounce that subsidies and other market distortions driven by developed countries have seriously affected the agricultural sector of developing countries, limiting the ability of this key sector to significantly contribute to the eradication of poverty and to sustained, inclusive economic growth and equitable, sustainable development, food security and rural development. We call for the immediate elimination of all forms of agricultural subsidies and other market-distorting measures taken by developed countries that are not in compliance with WTO rules. We urge developed countries to show flexibility and political will to adequately address these fundamental concerns of developing countries in the Doha Round of trade negotiations.

70. We reiterate our commitment to conclude multilateral disciplines on fisheries subsidies which give effect to the WTO Doha Development Agenda and the Hong Kong ministerial mandates to strengthen disciplines on subsidies in the fisheries sector, including through the prohibition of certain forms of fisheries subsidies that contribute to overcapacity and overfishing, recognizing that appropriate and effective special and differential treatment for developing and least developed countries should be an integral part of the WTO fisheries subsidies negotiation, taking into account the importance of the sector to development priorities, poverty reduction, and livelihood and food security.

71. We emphasize the need to strengthen the capacity of our countries, especially through international cooperation, to safeguard and enhance our people's nutrition through the promotion of their productive cultural and environmental practices.

72. We also emphasise the urgent need to increase efforts at the national, regional and international levels to address food security and agriculture development as an integral part of the international development agenda. We demand sustained funding and increased targeted investment to enhance world food production and call for new and additional financial resources from all sources to achieve sustainable agriculture development and food security.

73. We further emphasize the need to strengthen the agricultural sector as part of the post-2015 agenda with its means of implementation, to achieve food security, stressing the importance of including the knowledge, practices and technologies of indigenous peoples, rural communities and small- and medium-scale farmers in national, regional and international strategies aimed at achieving food security.

74. We welcome the adoption by the General Assembly of resolution 68/177 on the right to food and resolution 68/233 on agricultural development, food security and nutrition. We also welcome the Second International Conference on Nutrition, organised by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and WHO, to be held at FAO headquarters in Rome from 19 to 21 November 2014, which aims to approve the nutrition policy framework for the coming decades and to determine priorities for international cooperation in the field of nutrition in the short and medium term.

77. We call for the creation of conditions for the development of economic opportunities for the benefit of small-scale and family farmers, peasant and indigenous peoples and communities, and the creation of options for connecting them with consumers, as part of the national strategies for the realisation of the right to food.

78. We recognise the positive role of small-scale and family farmers, including women, cooperatives, indigenous peoples and local communities in developing countries, and their knowledge and practices, in the conservation and sustainable use of seeds, agrobiodiversity and biodiversity associated with food production of present and future generations.

79. We stress the need to address the root causes of excessive food price volatility, including its structural causes, at all levels, and the need to manage the risks linked to excessively volatile prices in agricultural commodities and their consequences for global food security and nutrition, as well as for small-scale farmers and poor urban dwellers.

80. We call for the prioritisation of development in the WTO Doha Round of negotiations in accordance with the Doha Development Agenda, including food security. We call for the promotion of the livelihoods of small-scale farmers and rural development in developing countries. In this context, we urge WTO members to adopt a permanent solution to the issue of public stock holding and food security for developing countries, as agreed by the WTO Ministerial Decision adopted in Bali, Indonesia, in 2013, as soon as possible.

81. We declare that family farms and small farms are an important basis for sustainable food production aimed at achieving food security (General Assembly resolution 66/222). In this framework, support should be given to the economic activities of sustainable family farming, taking into account the traditional knowledge of such farmers, in order to improve their situation and development, in particular promoting their access to financial services, productive resources and agricultural inputs such as land, seeds, appropriate technology, transport and information.

82. We will promote comprehensive and complementary national and regional actions for production, access and consumption based on integral, multisectoral and participatory planning, reassessing and strengthening sustainable family farming, small-scale farmers, indigenous peoples and Afro-descendants.

*Gomes F, with Legge D. Development. Food, nutrition, health in the new world order [Update]. World Nutrition July-August 2014, **5**, 7-8, 612-616*



Big Food Watch

Junk food is mass killer – UN health official

Access April 2014 report of UN Special Rapporteur on Health here
Access June 2014 UN statements on report of Special Rapporteur on Health here
Access June 2014 Human Rights Council-WHO statement on above report here
Access June 2014 Update on the need to regulate for good health here



A 46-year-old Cambodian man who lost his leg to diabetes. The annual global death toll from non-communicable diseases such as cancer, diabetes and heart disease, is estimated at 36 million. The UN has urged measures to to curb risk factors such as harmful consumption of tobacco, alcohol and foods high in saturated fats, sugar and salt. (This caption from a UN media release)

Fabio Gomes reports:

The picture and its caption above come from *an official UN media release* of 11 June. This summarises the findings of the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to health, Anand Grover. *Access his extensively referenced report here.* As accurately summarised: 'He blamed junk food – ultra-processed and ready to eat, that are energy-dense and contain "empty calories" devoid of nutritional value – for the global obesity epidemic… "The culprit is junk food… Containing high levels of sugar, salt, trans-fats and saturated fats, this 'junk' has unfortunately replaced healthy foods in our food… This is not a simple public health issue or a medical concern, it poses a serious challenge to our lives, our health and our rights". 'Policies of globalisation, market consolidation by transnational companies and supermarket chains, skewed foreign direct investment, and aggressive advertising of ultra-processed foods' are among the determining factors. No response from Big Food has been yet found.

*Gomes F. Junk food is mass killer – UN health official [Big Food Watch] [Update]. World Nutrition July-August 2014, **5**, 7-8, 617*

Development

Money, or well-being

Access June Update on Olivier de Schutter and sustainable development here
Access June Editorial on the boiling point here
Access this issue Update on G77-133 Santa Cruz Declaration here
Access this issue What do you think? on notions of progress, development



Rice fields in Bhutan, shaped in sympathy with the landscape. Here begins an old idea that can be for future also, which is that quality, most of all that which delights us, is our best guide and goal

Editorial introduction

Here is a glimpse into how we work here at *WN*. Thiago de Sá is the most recent member of the editorial team (welcome) and he makes lots of suggestions (great). He has just achieved a letter in *The Lancet*, with a supporting *Lancet* editorial (what a star). Earlier this year he suggested – no, insisted – that *WN* carry more contributions leading to the UN International Conference on Nutrition this November, and also on the UN pledge that the period post-the 2000-2015 Millennium Goals be devoted to sustainable development. You are right, we said. You're it! Consider yourself co-convenor of our new *Development* series. Oh, said Thiago. 'Will I be able? What I know about is physical activity'. 'Course you will', we said. 'Soon you will know about development also. Lucky you!'

But there is a snag. What is 'sustainable development'? We started to explain, but no need. Conscious people especially in the global South know that as conventionally measured in terms of gross national product, meaning turnover of money, 'sustainable development' is a contradiction in terms. So start by challenging the conventional idea, we said. Amartya Sen does, So does Jeffrey Sachs, now. But I am not an economist, Thiago said. Just as well! we said. Start by introducing the story of the king of Bhutan and his idea of Gross National Happiness. Let's be romantic. Maybe the good future of the world is now with small countries like the Himalayan kingdom of Bhutan with its three-quarters of a million people, north of India, south of China. Shoots from which great trees grow, and all that. OK, said Thiago.



Bhutan is Himalayan, west of Tibet. Its culture and philosophy have generic similarities with those of Tibet, but it is a constitutional monarchy whose king is committed to gross national happiness

Thiago Hérick de Sá reports:

This year, 20 March was the first UN International Happiness Day. Not many people know that. UN secretary-general Ban Ki-moon explained. As quoted: 'Speaking at the high level meeting on *Happiness and Well-Being: Defining a New Economic Paradigm* convened during the the 66th session of the General Assembly [he] stated that the world "needs a new economic paradigm that recognises the parity between the three pillars of sustainable development. Social, economic and environmental well-being are indivisible. Together they define gross global happiness". The meeting was convened following an initiative of Bhutan, a country which recognises the supremacy of national happiness over national income since the early 1970s and famously has adopted the goal of Gross National Happiness over Gross National Product'.

Now thanks to Ban Ki-moon's initiative, the idea behind the day is catching on. 'Not everything that counts can be counted, and not everything that can be counted counts', said Albert Einstein. Given the failure of traditional indicators, such as gross national product, to measure human development appropriately, the task now is to count what counts.

Beyond the political discussion around the Sustainable Development Goals, the political moment of the construction of the 2015-2025 new world order is also a great opportunity to build consensus on what should be pursued and, therefore, measured. Some interesting initiatives are already on course. The most remarkable attempt may indeed be the Gross National Happiness Index, which began to be developed and implemented in the small Himalayan country of Bhutan around 40 years ago. It is no easy to create quantity measures for a qualitative indicator, whether happiness, wellbeing or a better life. But any such ways to measure development are better than gross national product. It is better to be approximately right than precisely wrong.



Here is the young King of Bhutan Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck, an Oxford graduate, at the time of his marriage in 2011 to commoner Jetsun Pema. They look like an example of happiness

So if the concept of development equals material growth is junked, what is put in its place? That's a tough question to answer. Many proposals include reduction of transnational influence over everyday living, and reinforcement of local values and traditional knowledge. Many initiatives are coming from countries on the outskirts of capitalism. Leading scientists committed to public health, with thousands of health professionals, civil servants and citizens, are already involved in developing a new era for human development – and their processes are part of the progress.

Box 1

Development as well-being



Towards discovery of development as quality. Here are Thiago de Sá and Roberto de Vogli (left) and then Amartya Sen, Jeffrey Sachs, Richard Layard, Kate Pickett, Richard Wilkinson

'Is this what you expected?', asked Thiago, of his first draft. 'Remember this is work in progress' I said. 'No need for a thesis. Stick with Bhutan. Engage the reader. Let's use some evocative pictures, so, and some facts, so, and make clear that the UN is taking this seriously, so. Is this OK for you?' 'Yes' said Thiago. Impossible to overlook Amartya Sen or Jeffrey Sachs. Richard Layard is dedicated to happiness as the human goal and what this means. Kate Pickett and Richard Wilkinson are trustworthy on equity and equality. Show their faces so readers can google them. 'Our job with *WN*' I said, 'is to see the shape of the new world order that must emerge from the ashes'. 'Interesting' said Thiago. Yes, it is.

*De Sá T. Money, or well-being. [Development] [Update]. World Nutrition July-August 2014, **5**, 7-8, 618-620*



***WN** Farming*

Small is essential



Family and co-operative farmers are finding ever better rational ways to produce good food, and their methods are superior to those of the vast indusrialised farms, whose product is not food, but profit

Editorial introduction

Sarah Elton is the Canadian journalist, author and activist who invented a new concept in her book *Locavore: From Farmers' Fields to Rooftop Gardens.* Her new book, touched on here, is *Consumed: Food for a Finite Planet*. Her thinking, writing and practice has been described as part Francis Moore Lappé, part Michael Pollan, part Raj Patel. They and she share a passion to preserve the planet, and she has her own voice. *WN* is pleased to promote her work.

Sarah Elton reports:

Hundreds of millions of small farmers, growing diverse crops and raising animals, are the key to maintaining food production in the face of hotter temperatures and drought, especially in tropical regions.

This is my conclusion, after travelling to southern France, China, and India, as well as to the province of Quebec in my own country of Canada. I was there to observe how small farmers apply their practical knowledge of agriculture – particularly those types that make small or no use of agrochemicals, which may be known as organic or agroecological – or simply, sustainable.

What I found most impressive was to see how pervasive the social movement is at the grassroots. People in the rural areas are not waiting for government. They do not find that government is there to solve their problems. Small farmers are figuring out better ways themselves.

At the moment a global industrial food system, which is very big, but also very brittle, is producing most of the world's supply of food. Typically, it is reliant on the massive growing of single crops like wheat, corn or rice, which in turn are assisted by commercial agriculture inputs such as hybrid seeds, chemical based pesticides and fossil fuel-based fertilisers, as well as an overuse and abuse of water. Global industrial food is praised for its efficiency and high yields, and this tempts small farmers to try to get big. But then they become dependent on expensive commercial agricultural inputs, and have to borrow money to pay for them, and gradually become deeper in debt and despair.

In my new book I tell how Chandrakalabai, today a resourceful and thriving farmer in the agricultural state of Maharashtra in the western part of India, managed to avoid that fate. Originally, she struggled in terms of growing a range of items – millet, sorghum, vegetables and cotton, while buying commercial agricultural inputs when she could afford them. By the early 1990s, she made the switch to organic farming, minus these inputs and with the assistance of a non-government organisation, the Institute for Integrated Rural Development.

Chandrakalabai's story shows us that smaller farmers in the developing world can lessen their input costs and grow organically. If they can then embed themselves in a local food system with a minimum of intermediaries between them and the consumer, they can earn more money and secure a better future.

Another problem with global industrial food production is that single crop farming undermines the soil's fertility and makes these kinds of operations especially vulnerable to storms, floods and drought, now being increased by climate change I found out how 880 smallholders farming plots in Nicaragua,with diverse crops and minus any commercial agricultural inputs, managed to survive the catastrophic battering of Hurricane Mitch in 1998. This was because on average these agro-ecological operations retained 40 per cent more topsoil after the storm and lost 18 per cent less arable land in landslides.

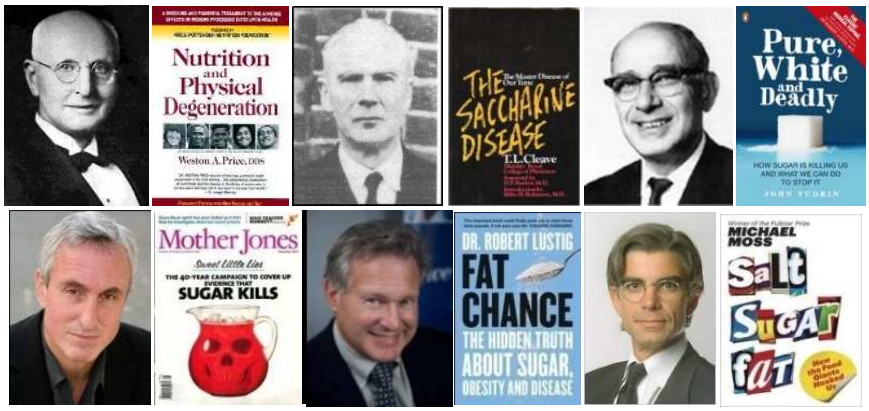
A return to rational farming is least likely to happen in North America, where farming operations are tied up in loans and big contracts to corporations in agribusiness and their unsustainable practices. But small farmers in the global South are in a better position. The North has much to learn from them.

*Elton S. Small is essential. [Farming] [Update]. World Nutrition July-August 2014, **5**, 7-8, 621-622*



WN *Sugar*
Vindication!

Access January 2014 Update on sugar here
Access February 2014 Editorial on sugar here
Access February 2014 Update on sugar here
Access March 2014 Update on sugar here
Access June 2014 on Fed Up movie on sugar here
Access this issue on Sugar and revenge of slaves here



Attacks on sugar (above) led in the US by Gary Taubes, Robert Lustig, and Michael Moss, draw on (top row) Weston Price, TL Cleave, John Yudkin, who at the time were largely ignored

The Sugar team reports:

The big news in June on sugar is from the UK. The official Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition (SACN) released its interim recommendations on added sugar consumption on 26 June. The proposal is that this be cut from the current maximum level of 10 per cent of dietary energy, to 5 per cent – as already suggested by the World Health Organization NUGAG group, whose final report is awaited.

The main significance of the lower figure is that 10 per cent or less can be managed merely by adjusting typical diets. A figure of 5 per cent or less is possible only by basing diets on minimally processed foods, and on freshly prepared meals, and by consuming ready-to-eat or –drink sugared ultra-processed products, inclusing soft drinks, only occasionally. As reported in *The Guardian*:

> The guideline level of dietary sugar should be slashed by half to the equivalent of one can of fizzy drink a day…People should get no more than 5% of their daily calories from so-called 'free sugar', a term that includes table sugar, and the sugar added to food and drinks… The advice, to be considered by the Department of Health after a three-month consultation, sets an upper limit on free sugar of around 25g or six teaspoons a day for a healthy woman, and around 35g or seven teaspoons for a man.

> Across all ages, people in England consume more than the existing guideline of 10% of calories as sugar, with adolescents consuming far more. On average, adults get around 12% of their daily energy from sugar, and for adolescents the figure rises to more than 15%. Scientists raised particular concerns about sugary drinks and urged people to minimise the amount they consumed, where possible swapping to healthier alternatives such as water or low-fat milk.
>
> The report found that a higher sugar intake was associated with tooth decay and weight gain in children and adults. Being overweight puts people at greater risk of type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease and some forms of cancer.

Commenting, Graham MacGregor, chair of the UK-based Action on Sugar, says: 'We are currently consuming far above the current recommendation of 10%, so it is fantastic that this strong recommendation has been put forward'. Simon Capewell, an AoS advisor, says: 'Parents and children are currently drowning in a world full of sugary drinks, cheap junk food and aggressive marketing targeting children… All we need now is the UK government to show they are genuinely committed to promoting the public's health, rather than supporting industry profits'.

The game is not yet over and the battle is not yet won. The interim report is subject to a three-month consultative period, within which Big Sugar will privately explain to UK politicians and officials that a big cut in sugar consumption implies trade and employment disaster. In any case, government does not have to accept what its advisory committees recommend.

Box 1

Giants' shoulders

The Sugar team comments:

Let us now praise persistent and courageous people. Investigators in the last century such as (picture strip above) Weston Price, TL Cleave and John Yudkin, who continued to state that sugar – consumed in typical amounts as added to processed products in industrial food supplies – is a separate and independent cause of obesity, diabetes, and what is now called the metabolic syndrome, were ignored or abused.

The science indicting sugar was always there. What was also there, was Big Sugar – and in particular the trade organisations set up to attack on behalf of the sugar industry, which includes all corporations whose profits depend on sugared ultra-processed products. This whole story needs to be told.. The ferocious and effective attacks of Gary Taubes, Robert Lustig and Michael Moss, standing on giant's shoulders, came at a time when the fortifications of Big Sugar were already crumbling, and full credit to them. But the people most of all to be admired and remembered, are those who persisted in the dark days and who are now being vindicated.

*The sugar team. Vindication! [Sugar] [Update]. World Nutrition July-August 2014, **5**, 7-8, 623-624*




The Food System

Advertisements for processing

Editorial note

Carlos Monteiro, convenor of the *Food System* project many of whose contributions appear in *WN*, has been approached by colleagues asking what he and the *TFS* team think about a number of papers published in the *Journal of Nutrition* (1) and the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*. These use a system of food classification according to nature and degree of processing, and conclude that processing is often beneficial and overall harmless and of itself is not a significant factor for personal or public health. By contrast, the *NOVA* classification of processing used by *The Food System* concludes that ultra-processed products are harmful and the less these are consumed, the better. So who is right?

The answer is in a letter from Carlos Monteiro sent to the *Journal of Nutrition* in late 2012, which the editor would not publish *The Journal of Nutrition* and the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* are both owned by the American Society of Nutrition, which has the right to publish its position papers in these journals. Technically, as in 2012 and now again in 2014, these papers are advertisements and are not peer-reviewed. Policy is that they do not accept responses. Carlos Monteiro asked if his letter could be published in *WN*, and here it is, below.

Carlos Monteiro reports:

We have a paper now in the final stages of preparation, showing that in both Brazil and US (national representative data, NHANES for US) ultra-processed products in the overall diet are strongly and independently associated with deterioration in the nutrient profile of the overall diet. This is valid for energy density, added sugar, saturated and *trans* fats, protein, fibre and almost all micronutrients. So, even with the narrow approach of only considering nutrient profile, ultra-processing of foods is clearly an unwise way to go, and reformulation can address only sodium, *trans* fats and perhaps a few micronutrients. Of course, it is also important to consider the impact of ultra-processing in terms of local development, culture and environment and these aspects of course are not touched by product reformulation.

We dealt with these issues in late 2012 after publication of the *Journal of Nutrition* paper claiming that processing is not significant – which is not true, of course.. I wrote a letter to *JN* with criticisms of the paper. But the editor responded that the paper was part of a (paid and usually not properly peer reviewed) supplement, and they did not publish letters on papers in supplements. This latest 2014 paper is also not peer reviewed. It was published by request of the American Society for Nutrition, which owns the *American Journal of Nutrition* and also the *Journal of Nutrition*. like in the other case, and is identified in the journal as an advertisement, which think is an accurate name for what it is.

The Food and Nutrition Science Solutions Joint Task Force (1) of a number of distinguished US nutrition and food science organizations, following an initiative of the International Food Information Council (2) that represents the interests of the food manufacturing industry, rightly states that practically all foods and drinks are processed in some sense. Its conclusion that intensity of processing is not important, no doubt now being intensively publicised, is bad science and bad public health.

I write as the director of the Centre for Epidemiological Studies in Health and Nutrition at the University of São Paulo, whose School of Public Health is supported entirely by public funds. The team here, with colleagues elsewhere, has undertaken research on food processing and health for many years (3-6). Our conclusions support those of colleagues in the US (7). Here are some brief comments.

The classification system used by the Task Force (1,2) is strange. What does 'mixtures of combined ingredients' mean? Examples include 'jarred tomato juice' and cake mix, yet the category also includes rice. Is this a mistake? In my country the term might mean meals. But perhaps the International Food Information Council is not in the business of encouraging home cooking. Bread is another 'mixture of combined ingredients', whereas garlic bread goes into the 'ready-to-eat foods needing minimal or no preparation' category together with sweets and alcoholic drinks. The classification developed by our Centre here is altogether more coherent. Readers can judge for themselves (3).

The conclusions of the Task Force are unsurprising, given its criteria. If you choose dietary cholesterol as a main marker for nutrition and health, as the Task Force does, the result will favor ultra-processed products, which are mostly plant-based, whereas fresh or minimally processed meat and eggs contain plenty of cholesterol. But is dietary cholesterol a real public health issue in the US or elsewhere? As a paper from much the same stable of organisations, with shared authors, states: 'Dietary cholesterol is now known to be only a modest contributor to blood cholesterol' (8).

Likewise with micronutrients. If you assume no difference between combinations of foods in which micronutrients are naturally present, and 'enriched' and 'fortified' ultra-processed energy-dense fatty, sugary or salty products, the result again would likely favour the processed products. From his time as vice-president (nutrition) at Kellogg's, co-author Victor Fulgoni may know how many thousands of tons of synthetic micronutrients are added every year in the US to all sorts of processed food and drink products.

If much more important factors such as added sugars and dietary fibre (9) are highlighted, as they should be, the story transforms. Also, high energy density, a main driver of obesity and associated chronic diseases (10), is ignored by the Task Force. *Trans* fats, which remain present in the US food supply, are also absent from the paper, despite the Task Force's declared objective to analyse food components to reduce as specified in the current US Dietary Guidelines (9).

The Task Force seems to be concluding that no matter how degraded the basic ingredients of processed and ultra-processed products are, most are low in cholesterol, and many contain substantial amounts of micronutrients in synthetic form. Therefore there is nothing to worry about.

Meanwhile obesity in the US remains a public health catastrophe. Does the Joint Task Force think that obesity is a physical activity deficiency disease? Or do they conclude that it's simply a matter of choosing wisely among processed products? If so, would it not be a public service to clearly identify which products are unwise choices?

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Food processing and health

Letter to the Editor, *Journal of Nutrition*

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Big Food Watch network member

Alejandro Calvillo. Alliance for Healthy Food

Access November 2012 Enrique Jacoby et al on Latin American law here
Access December 2013 BFW Fabio Gomes on Mexico soda tax here
Access May 2014 BFW letter to Mexican President here
Access this issue Fabio Gomes on BFW in Latin America here
Access this issue Alejandro Calvillo on Global Convention on food and health here



alianza por la salud alimentaria

Editorial note

In this issue of *WN* we profile another member of the *Big Food Watch* network, with an example of their commitment. For *BFW*, Alexandro Calvillo is founder and director of *El Poder del Consumidor* (Consumer Power). *El Poder* is a member of *Consumers International* and Alejandro actively participates in CI's global working group on food. He is also one of the founders and promoters of the Mexican Alliance for Healthy Food, featured here, and coordinates the Alliance's public campaigns.

The Big Food Watchers report: Alejandro Calvillo is a Mexican consumer rights, public health and environmental advocate. His 30 years of activism are grounded in social and environmental sciences, and anchored in scientific evidence. His work is inspired by knowing that public interest is not at the heart of public policy. He says: 'Political and economic powers and special interest groups are impeding changes for true social justice and public welfare. Deep down, it's a struggle for public truth. In Mexico, we are trying to create a more democratic society, and one great need is for a movement that expresses consumer interests.'

Alejandro saw that the 2006 *National Survey on Health and Nutrition* showing that Mexico has one of the highest and fastest rising rates of overweight and obesity globally, signalled a public health catastrophe, and potential collapse of the public health system. He saw that most of the policy solutions to this crisis involve consumer rights, such as to information, to protecting children from marketing, to healthy food, and to quality healthcare. So after twelve years of working at Greenpeace Mexico, in 2006 he founded *El Poder del Consumidor*, an independent, not-for-profit national organisation that advocates for consumer rights and promotes responsible consumerism. As a *Big Food Watch* member he is fiercely committed to information sharing and networking, in Latin America and globally.

Big Food Watchers

We need clear honest food product labelling



Would you give them 12 spoonfuls of sugar? Why give them soda? (sugared soft drinks? Messages such as this are Alliance specialities. The soft drink industry hates these, so they are working

In August 2012, concerned about staggering rates of malnutrition and obesity in Mexico and serious deterioration of healthy eating habits, more than 20 public interest organisations and social movements, together with academics, created a national coalition called the *Alianza por la Salud Alimentaria* (*the Alliance for Healthy Food).*

Alliance members pooled their various experiences, skills and knowledge, which include nutrition, consumer and children's rights, water, the environment, development, and sustainable agriculture, to develop a joint agenda grounded in four universal and Constitutional rights: to water, to food, to health, and the rights of the child. The Alliance of producers, consumers, nutrition, development and environmental experts, advocates for comprehensive policies to restore healthy eating habits and environments, and to combat all forms of malnutrition including obesity. The *Alliance's manifesto* explains the need for action in defence of public interest on priority issues:

- Compulsory access to purified free drinking water in all schools and public and commercial spaces.
- Healthy food and drinks in schools.
- Protection of children from targeted marketing of unhealthy foods and drinks.
- Compulsory clear and effective food labelling on processed food and drink products, highlighting risks to health.
- Nationwide campaigns and education clearly to inform the public about healthy versus non-healthy eating environments and options.
- Fiscal measures on sugar-sweetened drink and junk food products.
- Food security and food sovereignty, support for sustainable and sufficient food production, and access to quality food for all.
- Promotion of exclusive breastfeeding during the first 6 months of life.
- Compliance with international recommendations on breastmilk substitutes.

Collectively, the Alliance promotes effective public policy and denounces practices that harm the public interest. It does this by holding *expert forums*, engaging with decision-makers, and organising public actions and media outreach. For example, in the spring of 2013, in the face of corporate direct involvement (Nestlé and Pepsi-Co) in the Mexican government's 'National Crusade on Hunger', *the Alliance called for zero conflicts of interest* and *for the promotion of production, income generation and food security based on local, fresh foods and economies*, rather than transnational marketing and branding, the use of ultra-processed products, and baby food marketing.

In the autumn of 2013, the Alliance promoted a groundbreaking national tax on sugar-sweetened soft drinks, passed by Congress in October 2013 and effective in January 2014. The Alliance also advocates and lobbies for children's and public access to purified drinking water in all schools and public spaces; and in May 2014, a law was signed making the installation of drinking water dispensers mandatory in all schools within three years.

Currently the Alliance is tracking key national policies, like the *National Strategy for the Prevention and Control of Obesity and Diabetes*. This implies calling for independent expert and civil society participation in the formulation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the strategy's four pillars: fiscal, school food, labelling, and child-targeted marketing regulations and policies. The Alliance is calling for transparent, science-based policy-making with the participation of independent experts.

The Alliance's campaigns

Mass communications campaigns on the streets and in the media are one of the Alliance's main forms of action:

- *First came obesity, then diabetes* uses shocking images to expose the human trauma of diabetes in Mexico, raising questions about the health implications of sweetened soft drink consumption.
- *12 spoonfuls of sugar* informs the public about the quantity of sugar in soft drinks; and an adult offers children a bottle of soft drink, asking, 'Would you give them 12 spoonfuls of sugar? Why do you give them soft drinks?'
- *For a healthier Mexico* promotes a sugared drink tax with allocated revenue for prevention and treatment of obesity and associated diseases, including installation of drinking water fountains in schools and public spaces.
- *Don't harm yourself drinking sugary drinks* warns the public about the risks, urging consumers to choose healthier options.
- *Let's go back to water. Because water is life* invites people to drink water and to support the need for public drinking water fountains.
- *Our kids come first* (in English.) calls for the prohibition of all child-targeted marketing of unhealthy food and drink products.

Box 1

Mexican food labelling must be clear and honest

In October 2013, President Enrique Peña Nieto announced the Mexican government's *National Strategy for Prevention and Control of Overweight, Obesity and Diabetes* to curb the epidemic of overweight and obesity, and associated diseases, notably Type 2 diabetes. This strategy includes Mexico's federal taxes on sugar-sweetened drinks and junk food. It also includes a labelling policy which is impossible to understand and full of contradictions.

The *new front-of-package labelling enacted by the Mexican federal sanitary authority (COFEPRIS)* in 2014 adopts Guideline Daily Allowance (GDA) criteria for front of pack (FOP) labelling that have been developed and used voluntarily by the industry since 2010 in Mexico. This labelling has been criticised by the independent scientific community and civil society organisations. The criteria used for sugar lack scientific evidence, contradict WHO recommendations, and can lead to consuming high quantities of sugar, because:

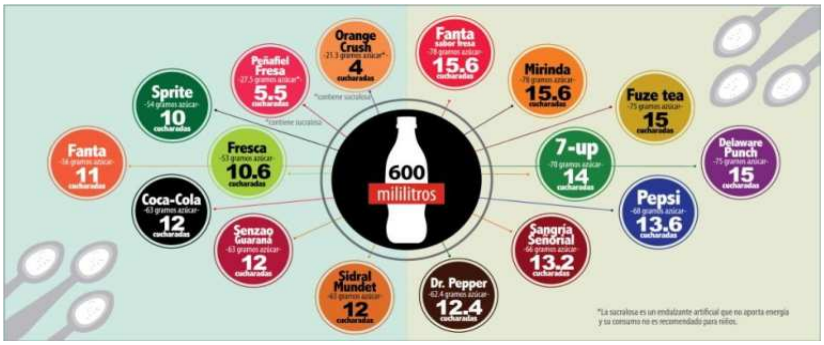
- The mandatory GDA FOP labelling, which shows the percentage content of the product based on 'Recommended Daily Intakes', is incomprehensible. A paper published by the National Institute of Public Health in 2011 concluded that not even university nutrition students understand FOP GDAs. This is a violation of current Mexican sanitary guidelines, which state that labelling must clearly inform consumers and not mislead them.

- The criteria established for added sugars contradict the criteria promoted by the World Health Organization (WHO) and the *National Strategy against Obesity and Diabetes.* The new labelling establishes an RDI of 90 grams of added sugar (equal to 18 spoonfuls), whereas WHO indicates 50 grams as the maximum tolerable daily intake and is currently contemplating a reduction to 25 grams (equivalent to 5 spoonfuls of added sugar). The gap between these guidelines is frightening considering the increasing evidence of risks from added sugars.

- The criteria to determine the new voluntary nutrition front of pack seal of approval contradicts the criteria used for fiscal measures and child-targeted marketing. The standards are inconsistent. Some food and drink products, taxed for their high calorie content and contribution to the overweight and obesity epidemic, could nonetheless easily qualify for a nutritional seal bestowed by the Secretary of Health, distinguishing them as 'healthy' products. Also some of these 'unhealthy' food products would also pass under the threshold and qualify for being aired on television, despite the new ban on child-targeted marketing during children's programming. The products of special concern are nectars and processed juices, due to their high sugar content, similar to soft drinks

Hence, the new criteria for labelling in Mexico (and for the regulation of child- targeted marketing) are putting the rights to health, information and protection of the child, at risk. They were not established by a group of independent experts. They were designed by the food and drink product manufacturing industry and then adopted by COFEPRIS. These criteria are more lax than the companies' own criteria, placing the entire *National Strategy for Prevention and Control of Overweight, Obesity and Diabetes* at risk.

The Alliance calls for COFEPRIS' new labelling and publicity regulations to be revoked. We entreat our government to create an independent, scientific body free from conflicts of interest, to set new criteria based on international recommendations and best practices.



This attractive message shows the number of spoonfuls of sugar there are in all sorts of ultra-processed drink products. The common initial reaction of people when asked and told is horror

Several of these campaigns have been censored by Big Mexican media , outdoor publicity companies or publishing houses aligned with the food and drink product manufacturing industry, constituting serious violations to the Mexican public's right to information, health and access to the airways. Alliance action has included:

- *A protest in front of COFEPRIS offices* at which children tried to carry a year's weight of the recommended 90 grams of sugar, amounting to 32.85 kilograms.
- Alliance members filed *an injunction against the labelling,* because of being impossible to understand and being at odds with WHO criteria and the *National Strategy against Obesity and Diabetes*.
- *An open letter to President Peña Nieto, signed by 35 international experts* celebrating the soft drink tax and expressing concern regarding the failure of the new labelling policy in Mexico to identify and warn of added sugars.

Alejandro Calvillo *has been asking* the Secretary of Health, Mercedes Juan, if she agrees with the Alliance and the 35 international experts who believe that this new labelling is dangerous. Will she and the President agree that the disaster in our country of obesity and diabetes merits reinventing these labels? Or will we have to resign ourselves to sacrificing the national strategy and the health of the Mexican people?

*Big Food Watch network member. Alejandro Calvillo. Alliance for Health Food and Nutrition. [Update]. World Nutrition July-August 2014, **5**, 7-8, 628-632*

How to respond

Updates are short communications designed to add new information to *WN* commentaries and other contributions. They are invited from all readers. Updates can be to *WN* commentaries and other contributions published at any time. Usual length for main text of *Updates* is between 500 and 1,500 words but they can be shorter or longer. Any references should usually be limited to up to 10 but more are acceptable for longer pieces. *Updates* are edited for length and style, may be developed, and once edited are sent to authors for approval. Address contributions for publication to wn.updates@gmail.com