WN *Development*

World Nutrition **Volume 5, Number 7, July-August 2014**

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

UN food and nutrition strategy
Crisis of confidence

Fabio Gomes
Convenor, Big Food Watch
Email: Fabiodasilvagomes@gmail.com

Alejandro Calvillo
El Poder Del Consumidor
Mexico City, Mexico
www.elpoderdelconsumidor.org

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 Alejandro Calvillo on the Alliance for Healthy Food here

Fabio Gomes reports from Rome and Geneva:

What follows is an edited version of a letter sent by 45 Mexican organisations to UN Food and Agriculture Organization director-general José Graziano da Silva. It shows the dissatisfaction of professional, consumer and public interest organisations and social movements, with the organisers of the UN International Conference on Nutrition to be held in November. Other letters like this have been sent. It is hoped that the FAO and WHO directors-general will now act to resolve an acute crisis of confidence concerning influence of transnational corporations on the global food and nutrition policy-making process.

Dear Dr da Silva. With this communication, we share our deep concern about the importance of keeping transnational corporations out of national and international policy-making discussions. Mexico is a prime example of the interference of these corporations in issues of public health. Today's food situation in our country and many other countries around the world is in a state of serious deterioration, making it essential to take action and ensure all necessary measures to restore food and nutritional health grounded in sustainable food systems.

Mexico's rich and balanced traditional diet, based on the cultural and biological diversity of the country and Mesoamerican crop-growing system, has been shattered by invasion of highly processed food products. The results include the following:

- In Mexico, the leading causes of death are now diabetes and cardiovascular diseases. 10% of these deaths are caused by the intake of sugar-sweetened beverages. The majority of the national health budget is used to address such preventable diseases. The total cost to treat these diseases associated with overweight and obesity stands at $80 billion pesos a year and will reach $150 billion in 2017, if effective preventive action is not taken (1).

- 85 per cent of newborns are fed with formula (2). Formulas, especially follow-up formulas for babies six months or older, have high levels of added sugar (14-27 per cent) (3). Almost 40 per cent of preschoolers' energy intake comes from industrialised processed foods (4). 12 per cent of children's total energy comes from soda (4). On average, in Mexico a child watches around 11 junk food commercials an hour (5,6). Mexicans are the highest global consumers of soda (163 liters per year) (7) and one of the largest consumers of snacks (8).

- 64.8 million of Mexicans (55.3 per cent) live in conditions of poverty and extreme poverty. 18 per cent of children under 5 years old suffer from some form of undernutrition. 34 per cent of schoolchildren are overweight or obese. 35 per cent of adolescents and 70 per cent of adults are overweight or obese. 14 per cent of Mexican adults have been diagnosed with diabetes (2).

- There is a thumbprint of industry presence and pressure on Mexico's new regulations on food and drink product front-of-package labelling and marketing to children. These recommend a daily sugar intake of 90 grams of added sugars and will allow certain products to carry a nutritional stamp promoting them as healthy including to children, when they are really not (9).Another example of industry violations and obstructions to public health is the lack of fulfillment of the International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes (10).

- While millions of small-scale producers are submerged in poverty, in debt and in ruin, 10 of the biggest agro industries are receiving vast government subsidies. In

- 2011 alone, corporations like Bachoco, Gamesa, Cargill, Gradesa, Maseca, among others, received 1.4 billion pesos in subsidies. Meanwhile 18 million of the estimated 27 million people living in rural areas in Mexico do not have access to the basic food basket. More than 50 per cent of these people are children (11). Imports of products like maize, beans and other foods continue to grow while small and medium-scale producers work with great efforts and face huge conflicts to be able to produce and commercialise their products (12).

- Corporations drive policies that pose risks to family agriculture and public welfare in order to increase their profit margins. Farmers who previously were self-sufficient have had to migrate due to the damage to the Mexican countryside. The remaining rural population faces increasing risk of transgenic contamination of their crops. Transnationals and the Mexican government seek to impose mass-scale production of genetically modified corn. The citizenry is defending native maize through a class action suit against genetically modified maize. This suit has so far faced 63 challenges from corporations and the government (13).

Human suffering, rights violations and thousands of preventable deaths lie behind these numbers. They show an ominous obesogenic environment and generalised malnutrition in our country, This induces deterioration of eating habits and is producing overweight, obesity, diabetes and other diseases at alarming rates. The population is unprotected, lacking guarantees of the rights to information, health, water, and healthy, safe and culturally appropriate food, as well as dignified lives.

Big Industry and corporate action has been the most significant force behind obstacles to and blockage of effective regulations for ensuring a healthy eating environment and systems, from cultivation to consumption (14,15). The government is omitting to protect the right to health and to appropriate food for the Mexican population and acts in favour of private interests over public interests.

Mexico is a Member State of the United Nations. The recommendations that UN and other international bodies issue are very important to our country and potentially are of great support for our citizenry and our government in implementing the best possible protections and instruments to guarantee public welfare. Thus we request that international organisations:

- Permit and facilitate the full formal active involvement of public interest and civil society organisations and social movements in preliminary discussions towards, and at the 2nd UN International Conference on Nutrition.
- Recognise the need to clarify and take action on individual and institutional conflicts of interest.
- Carry out policymaking without the involvement of Big Industry and keep policies free of conflicts of interest

Al Consumidor
Alianza por la Salud Alimentaria
Asociación de Usuarios de Agua de Saltillo
Asociación Nacional de Empresas Comercializadoras de Productores del Campo
Ayuda en Acción
Blue Planet Project
Campaña Sin Maíz no Hay País
Centro de Atención a la Mujer Trabajadora de Chihuahua
Centro de Capacitación en Ecología y Salud para Campesinos y Defensoría del Derecho a la Salud
Centro de Derechos Humanos Fray Francisco Vitoria OP
Centro de Formación Moxviquil
Coalición de Organizaciones Mexicanas por el Derecho al Agua Colectivas
Colectivo Isitame
Colectivo Peninsular Ko'one'ex t'aan
Comunidades Campesinas y Urbanas Solidarias con Alternativas
Consejo Nacional de Organizaciones Campesinas
El Barzón
El Poder del Consumidor
Enlace Comunicación y Capacitación
Food & Water Watch;
Food First Information and Action Network, México
Fundación Ayuda en Acción
Fundación Interamericana del Corazón
Fundación Mídete
Grupo de Estudios Ambientales
Grupo Vicente Guerrero
The Hunger Project
International Baby Food Action Network, México
Instituto Maya
Integrantes del Proyecto de Mercadeo Solidario, Alimentación y Nutrición
Movimiento Agrario Indígena Zapatista
Mujer y Medio Ambiente
Ñepi Behña
Oxfam México
Red de Acción en Plaguicidas y sus Alternativas en México
Red de Acción por el Agua, México)
Red de Comunicadores Boca de Polen
Red de Género y Medio Ambiente
Red Mexicana por la Agricultura Familiar y Campesina
Red Nacional de Promotoras y Asesoras Rurales
Red por los Derechos de la Infancia en México
Semillas de Vida
Slow Food Mexico and Central America
Vía Orgánica

References

1 *El Poder del Consumidor* at: http://elpoderdelconsumidor.org/saludnutricional/10-de-muertes-provocados-por-la-obesidad-en-mexico-se-deben-al-consumo-de-bebidas-azucaradas/.

2 Gutiérrez JP, Rivera J *et al. Encuesta Nacional de Salud y Nutrición* 2012. Cuernavaca, Mexico: Instituto Nacional de Salud Pública, 2012.

3 Calvillo A, Cabada X, García K. La alimentación industrializada del lactante y niño pequeño , el nuevo mega negocio. *El Poder del Consumidor* 2013. Mexico City.

4 González-Castell D, González-Cossio T, Barquera S *et al.* Alimentos industrializados en la dieta de los preescolares mexicanos.*Salud Pública Mex* 2007; **49**: 345-335

5 *Instituto Nacional de Salud Pública.* Publicidad de alimentos y bebidas. Available at: http://www.insp.mx/epppo/blog/2984-publicidad-alimentos-bebidas.html

6 *El Poder del Consumidor*. La Publicidad de comida chatarra dirigida a la infancia en México. October 2010.

7 Euromonitor, 2009

8 *Revista del Consumidor de la Procuraduría Federal del Consumidor* Reporte de pastelillos empacados. Available at: http://revistadelconsumidor.gob.mx/ wp-content/uploads/ 2014/04/RC445_Pastelitos.pdf

9 *El Poder del Consumidor.* Impera caos y contradicción en los criterios de gobierno para combatir la obesidad. Available at: http://elpoderdelconsumidor.org/ salud nutricional/impera-caos-y-contradiccion-en-el-combate-gubernamental-la-obesidad/

10 Calvillo A, Cabada X, García K Cesáreas y lactancia materna, las primeras causas de la epidemia de obesidad en México. *El Poder del Consumidor* 2013. México

11 Alonso-Sánchez LM. Millones en pobreza, 10 grandes empresas absorben subsidio. *El Punto Crítico*. 2012.

12 Vargas U. En riesgo más de 150 mil toneladas de manzana. *El Barzón*, Mexico. 2013. Available at: http://elbarzon.mx/2014/03/en-riesgo-mas-de-150-mil-toneladas-de manzana-el-barzon-chihuahua/

13 San Vicente A. La defensa de nuestro maíz contra los transgénicos. *El Universal.* 2013. Mexico. Available at: http://blogs.eluniversal.com.mx/weblogs_detalle20220.html

14 *Bellagio Declaration* 2013. Available at: http://bellagioobesity 2013. web.unc.edu/files/2013/11/bellagio_declaration_11-11-13.pdf.

15 WHO. Director-General addresses health promotion conference. Available at: http://www.who.int/dg/speeches/2013/ health_ promotion_20130610/en/.

Status

Cite as: Gomes F, Calvillo A. UN food and nutrition poliy. Crisis of confidence. *[Development] World Nutrition*, July-August 2014, **5,** 7-8, 637-641. All *WN* contributions are obtainable at www.wphna.org. Readers may make use of the material in this commentary if *WN* is cited. Address letters for publication to wn.letters@gmail.com. *World Nutrition* commentaries are reviewed internally or by invitation. All contributions are the responsibility of their authors. They should not be taken to be the view or policy of the World Public Health Nutrition Association unless this is explicitly stated.