WN *Update*

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Development

Return to regulation, for world health

Access December 2011 Olivier de Schutter report to Human Rights Council here
Access April 2014 Olivier de Schutter report to Human Rights Council here
Access 19 May 2014 Olivier de Schutter on world food system regulation here
Access 21 May 2014 Consumers International-World Obesity document here



Olivier de Schutter completes six years as UN special rapporteur on the right to food. He says that current dominant food systems are broken, and must be properly regulated by elected governments

The Development team reports:

The call for a World Health Organization Framework Convention on food and health, following that on tobacco, is growing louder. It is now championed by many organisations convened by Consumers International and the World Obesity Federation. Why, is because the current world food system is broken – 'deeply dysfunctional', as says Olivier de Schutter (above) (1). He has now completed his second and final term as the United Nations special rapporteur on the right to food.

After six years of travelling the world for his UN work, he sees the big picture. On 19 May, the first day of last month's WHO World Health Assembly, he stated: 'Attempts to promote healthy diets will only work if the food systems underpinning them are put right. Governments have been focusing on increasing calorie availability, but they have often been indifferent to what kind of calories are on offer, at what price, to whom

they are made available, and how they are marketed' (2). His statement begins with the challenging claim that: 'Unhealthy diets are now a greater threat to global health than tobacco'. He adds: 'Just as the world came together to regulate the risks of tobacco, a bold framework convention on adequate diets must now be agreed' (2).

Global convention for healthy diets

He issued his statement two days before the launch at the Geneva Press Club, chaired by Corinna Hawkes of the UK-based World Cancer Research Fund, of *Towards a Global Convention to Protect and Promote Healthy Diets* (3). This set of recommendations from Consumers International and World Obesity is derived and developed from proposals made by UK and European policy experts from professional and public health organisations.

The document is identified by Consumers International as a 'conversation starter', or as 'a catalyst for international debate and for the creation of a robust process that will culminate in a strong and effective agreement'. Like the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, it is meant as a basic specification to give member states scope for measures suitable for their circumstances. The recommendations are mostly designed to support consumer choice, and as stated in the document include:

- Education skills, communications and public awareness
- Provision of nutrition information
- Ensuring responsible food and beverage advertising, promotion and sponsorship
- Controls on advertising promotion and sponsorship to children
- Improved nutritional quality of food and reduced levels of potentially harmful nutrients
- Nutritional standards for food services in schools, hospitals and public institutions
- Interventions to influence positive consumption patterns

Supporters include the World Cancer Research Fund, and World Action on Salt and Health; the UK Health Forum, Faculty of Public Health, Royal Society for Public Health, and the Society for Social Medicine; the European Public Health Alliance, and the European Public Health Association. Boyd Swinburn, co-chair of World Obesity, present at the Press Club launch, also supports a framework convention.

Proposals for healthy food systems

Olivier de Schutter was also present at the launch. His proposals range wider. They are more concerned with supply, manufacture and food systems as a whole, as distinct from demand and consumer choice. Two of his five points below indicate the need for equitable food systems. Thus, with reference to an earlier document (4), his 19 May statement says: 'In his 2012 report…the Special Rapporteur identified five priority actions to address the issues of obesity and unhealthy diets' (2):

- Taxing unhealthy products
- Regulating foods high in saturated fats, salt and sugar
- Cracking down on junk food advertising
- Overhauling misguided agricultural subsidies that make certain ingredients cheaper than others
- Supporting local food production so that consumers have access to healthy, fresh and nutritious foods

Olivier de Schutter also refers to the need for regulation of transnational and other huge food product industries. Thus on new moves to regulate advertising of infant formula in Hong Kong, the Philippines and elsewhere, he says: 'Governments should move forward with these measures, which are essential to ensure that people are protected from aggressive misinformation campaigns'. He adds, as a lawyer: 'Suggestions that these steps could violate World Trade Organization law by restricting international trade, are simply false' (2).

In a report to the UN Human Rights Council submitted in January this year (5), he states: 'We have entered a new century, and the questions we now face are different from those of 50 years ago. A new paradigm based on well-being, resilience and sustainability must be designed, to replace the productivist paradigm'. In an earlier 2011 report (1) he states: 'Food systems must ensure the access of all to sustainable diets, defined as diets with low environmental impacts which contribute to food and nutrition security and to healthy life for present and future generations. Sustainable diets are protective and respectful of biodiversity and ecosystems, culturally acceptable, accessible, economically fair and affordable nutritionally adequate, safe and healthy, while optimising natural and human resources '…

He continues: 'Following… the North American Free Trade Agreement, US companies massively increased investments in the Mexican food processing industry (from $US 210 million in 1987 to $US 5.3 billion on 1999) and sales of processed foods in Mexico soared at an annual rate of 5 to 10 per cent in the period from 1995 to 2003. The resulting rise in soft drink and snack consumption by Mexican children is at the source of the very high rates of child obesity in the country'.

Development



Beginning in this issue, *WN* will be publishing contributions with the general heading of *Development*. Initially these will mainly be concerned with the new UN strategy to promote sustainable development in the 2015-2030 period. As here, they will also examine what forms development can take in order to be and remain sustainable. The next issues of *WN* will also look forward to the second UN International Conference on Nutrition this coming November, convened by the UN Food and Agriculture Organization and the World Health Organization, with support from other UN and associated agencies.

Further: 'The power of the agrifood industry to influence diets has been well documented, and the public budgets for nutrition education are no match for the advertising budgets of fast food and sweet beverage companies… The promotion of foods that are known to have detrimental health effects should [not] be allowed to continue umimpeded: these products reduce the life expectancy in particular of the poorest segment of the population, who are also the least nutritionally literate….'

He adds: 'An international framework, in the form of an international code of conduct regulating the marketing of food and beverages in support of national efforts, might be desirable in order to take into account the international nature of commercial promotion of energy-dense, micronutrient-poor food and beverages'.

The findings of Olivier de Schutter's 2012 report referred to above (4) are summarised in a media release issued by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights on 6 March 2012 (6). (See Box 1, below).

Box 1

'The public health disaster of bad diets'

This is taken from the media release issued by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights on 6 March 2012 (5), referring to the report by Olivier de Schutter published on that day (4). This includes the five points in his statement on 19 May 2014 (2).

'Our food systems create sick people' warned today United Nations Special Rapporteur on the right to food… We need to tackle the systemic problems which generate poor nutrition… However, we continue to prescribe remedies like a doctor: nutrition pills and early-life strategies for those lacking in calories; slimming pills, lifestyle advice and calorie counting for the overweight'…

'We have deferred to food companies the responsibility for ensuring that a good nutritional balance emerges. Voluntary guidelines and piecemeal nutrition initiatives have failed to create a system with the right signals, and the odds remain stacked against the achievement of a healthy, balanced diet', he said.

The Special Rapporteur also identified the abundance of processed food as a major threat to improving nutrition. 'Heavy processing thrives in our global food system, and is a win-win for multinational agri-food companies. Processed items can be produced and distributed on a huge scale, thanks to cheap subsidized ingredients and their increased shelf life'. 'But for the people, it is a lose-lose', he stressed. 'Heavily processed foods lead to diets richer in saturated and trans-fatty acids, salt, and sugars. Children become hooked on the junk foods targeted at them. In better-off countries, the poorest population groups are most affected, because foods high in fats, sugar and salt are often cheaper than healthy diets, as a result of wrong-headed subsidies whose health impacts have been wholly ignored….'

'The West is now exporting diabetes and heart disease to developing countries, along with the processed foods on the shelves of global supermarkets. By 2030, more than 5 million people will die each year before the age of 60 from non-communicable diseases linked to diets. 'We should not simply invest our hopes in medicalizing our diets with enriched products, or changing people's choices through health warnings. Ambitious, targeted nutrition strategies can work, but only if the food systems underpinning them are put right'.

On the initiative announced on 19 May, World Obesity director of policy Tim Lobstein states: 'Because obesity is largely caused by the overconsumption of fatty and sugary foods, we have seen policy-makers unwilling to take on the corporate interests who promote these foods. Governments need to take collective action and a Framework Convention offers them the chance to do this.'

There is another way. A group led by the O'Neill Institute for International and Global Health Law in the US propose a wider-ranging policy, not on food including health, but on health including food. Published by WHO last year (7), they call for a global convention on health 'to eliminate gross health inequities', saying 'substantial improvements in health would be achieved through a population-based strategy based on the essential conditions for the public's health'.

References

1 United Nations General Assembly. Report submitted by the Special Rapporteur on the right to food, Olivier de Schutter. Human Rights Council, 19th session, 26 December 2011. A/HRC/19/59. *Access pdf here*

2 Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. Unhealthy diets greater threat to health than tobacco: UN expert calls for global regulation. Geneva: OHCHR, 19 March 2014. *Access pdf here*

3 Consumers International, World Obesity. *Towards a Global Convention to Protect and Promote Healthy Diets*. London: CI-WO, May 2014. *Access pdf here*

4 Special Rapporteur on the right to food. Report on the agriculture-food-health nexus made to the UN Human Rights Council, 6 March 2012.

5 United Nations General Assembly. Report submitted by the Special Rapporteur on the right to food, Olivier de Schutter. Human Rights Council, 25th session, 24 January 2014. A/HRC/25/57. *Access pdf here*

6 Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. Five ways to tackle the public health disaster of bad diets – UN expert on the right to food. Geneva: OHCHR, 6 March 2012. *Access pdf here*

7 Gostin L, Friedman E, Buse K *et al.* Towards a framework convention on global health. *Bulletin of the World Health Organization* 2013, **91**, 790-793

8 The Update team. Food systems. The Eat Forum. How to nourish the planet *[Update]. World Nutrition* May 2014, **5**,5, 416-419. *Access pdf here*

To be continued...

At the EAT Forum held in Stockholm at the end of May (8) it was announced that Olivier de Schutter, and Olivia Yambi of Tanzania (previously of UNICEF), are the two co-chairs of the newly formed Carasso Foundation International Panel of Experts on Sustainable Food Systems. We will be hearing more from Olivier de Schutter. Watch this space...

*The Development team. Return to regulation, for world health. [Update]. World Nutrition June 2014, **5**, 6, 511-515*

UN International Conference on Nutrition

First priority is sustainable food systems

Access November 2013 ICN2 Rome Accord here
Access May 2014 Rome Declaration here
Access Association response to Rome Declaration on-line here



This is the year of the UN International Conference on Nutrition. It is also the FAO Year of Family Farming. It is at last time to recognise, valorise, strengthen small-scale sustainable industry

Association external affairs secretary Fabio Gomes reports:

The second UN International Conference on Nutrition takes place on 19-21 November this year. Convened by the UN Food and Agriculture Organization, with the World Health Organization, and other UN and associated bodies, it will be held in Rome.

An outcome of ICN2 will be the *Rome Declaration*, to be approved and endorsed with commitments to action by UN member states. Two preliminary drafts have been circulated for open comment, including by 'the private sector' and by civil society organisations, among others. The comments of the World Public Health Nutrition Association, which are approved by its Executive Committee, is contained in Box 1, below. The comments make full sense in the context of *the draft Declaration, accessed here*, and can also be *read on-line here.* Two main concerns are the need for the conference as a whole and therefore the final *Rome Declaration* to pay full heed of the forces that now shape the world food system, and also to give full recognition to the fundamental and elemental importance of small-scale industry in all aspects of food systems, from production to consumption.

Box 1

World Public Health Nutrition Association Response to draft #2 of the UN ICN2 Rome Declaration

This is an abbreviated version of the full response which can be accessed here

We, the World Public Health Nutrition Association (WPHNA), welcome the opportunity to comment on the revised draft of the political outcome *Rome Declaration on Nutrition* of ICN2.... We urge FAO, WHO, and other members of the UN family, to come together with a will, to give ICN2 all possible and feasible support...

The document as now drafted has some omissions which we suggest can be readily addressed, and as partners we will be pleased to support the drafters in the process of adjustment and revision. We see four omissions perhaps above all.

One is that it is framed in general terms including in places where greater specificity would be helpful. Documents designed to give global guidance need to guard against overlooking and neglecting the diversity which is a glory of human achievement and a wonder of the living and physical world. We should approach our work in a spirit of respect and even humility and be careful not to think or act as if we have all the answers.

Two is that it makes little reference to the political and economic as distinct from the social and environmental determinants of food systems and thus food supplies and dietary patterns. There is an extensive literature on this fundamental aspect of food systems and many member states are now addressing salient issues.

Three is that it does not make much reference to broader aspects of nutrition. These include long established appropriate sustainable agriculture and food systems, native foods that are exceptionally nutritious in the context both of nutritional deficiencies and of overweight, obesity and diabetes, or to meals, cooking, food culture and tradition, commensality, and the impact of food as acquired, prepared and consumed on family, community and social life, as well as on relationships with the living and physical world...

Four is that the whole document should be examined to ensure that in its totality, explicitly and implicitly, it does indeed support the human right to adequate nourishing food; and also that it recognises, valorises and supports the wisdom and knowledge of all those 'on the ground' within countries, municipalities and rural and urban communities whose knowledge and wisdom upholds and develops long-established and traditional food systems that have evolved rationally in response to climate, terrain and resources. In this respect we believe that special recognition and value should be given to regions and countries whose food systems and dietary cultures are of continuous long duration....

Specific comments on the paragraphs related to the multiple threats that malnutrition poses to sustainable development (paragraphs 4-10).

... On over-nutrition, leading to overweight and obesity, and related diseases and diabetes in particular, we suggest that the document should make explicit reference to the corporate actors whose activities are driving food systems towards greater supply of fatty, sugary or salty processed products. Evidence that the policies of international food manufacturers, caterers and associated actors in effect displace long-established sustainable food systems is we suggest not seriously disputed, and indeed is acknowledged by those actors in their agreements to reformulate some of their products.

Specific comments on the vision for global action to end all forms of malnutrition (paragraphs 11-12).

… We suggest that the document as now drafted gives rather too much emphasis to development that involves highly capitalised and intensive methods. For example, one passage refers to 'investments and incentives for agricultural production, food processing and distribution'. Misunderstood, this could imply greater intensification, concentration of land and resource ownership and control, loss of land ownership and rights, unjust use and privatisation of common goods such as water, and continued and even accelerated loss of agricultural, horticultural and species and variants biodiversity.

We suggest that passages like this need to be rephrased in order to support investments and incentives that are controlled and driven nationally and locally, with affirmative action in favour of small and family farmers whose livelihoods continue to be threatened by inequitable and unjust events and circumstances beyond their control, whose produce amounts to most of the world's food supplies.

When referring to legislative and regulatory framework the document as now drafted focuses on food safety and quality control. These are essential. It is now we believe agreed beyond serious dispute that what is also needed are effective statutory regulation of supply of and demand for unhealthy products, and of their advertising and marketing, most of all but not only to children up to the age of 18.

We would also appreciate your vision on policies, programmes and investment that might help translate such commitments into action.

… Malnutrition in all its forms is mostly basically caused by structural failures in food systems and supplies. This has always been so. Conversely, population good health and well-being is vitally enhanced by food systems and supplies that are adequate and equitable. This also has always been so.

We believe that all those most concerned with ICN2 will do well to continue to see this 'big picture', which explains why the current interconnected food, finance and fuel crises, manifested among other phenomena by gross economic and social inequity, climate change, fluctuations in availability of food, and continuing food insecurity, all of which are triggering riots and uprisings, are relevant to our considerations.

We admire the work done by colleagues within the UN System, and now also within associated agencies notably the World Bank, to drive towards equitable, sustainable food systems and supplies, and thus adequate and nourishing food and nutrition for a growing world population. These responsibilities are very serious and must be seen as one crucial part of the drive to recover, protect and enhance sustainable systems of world, national municipal and local governance within increasingly participatory democracies. This is the best chance for humanity at this critical time in history. Our policies and actions now will be judged in future. We are at your disposal to support you in your work from now leading to ICN2, at the conference, and thereafter.

*Gomes F. UN International Conference on Nutrition. First priority is sustainable food systems [Update]. World Nutrition June 2014, **5**, 6, 516-518*

The Eat Forum. Public health nutrition
The point has tipped

Access May Update on EAT Forum
Access this issue's Editorial here
Access this issue on sugar, the Fed Up movie and Bill Clinton here



Public health nutrition goes big-time. Carlos Monteiro being congratulated by Bill Clinton at the EAT Forum on agriculture, food, nutrition and the environment held in Stockholm in late May.

Editor's note

The EAT Forum meeting in Stockholm was *previewed in the May issue of WN*. It has exceeded expectations. It gives public health nutrition a new importance. Gunhild Stordalen of the Stordalen Foundation assembled an astounding and appropriate combination of leaders including Walter Willett, Tim Lang and (above) Carlos Monteiro, together with (above) Bill Clinton, Prince Charles, and many others. The next EAT meeting is on 1-2 June 2015. Bruce Cogill's account is taken from the site of Bioversity International.

Bruce Cogill of Bioversity International reports:

Why would 500 industry, academic, philanthropic and research leaders come to share their ideas, along with some of the visionaries of the 21st century such as Bill Clinton, Prince Charles, Johan Rockstrom, Richard Horton, Hans Rosling, Walter Willett, Tim Lang and Jeffrey Sachs? It is simple. They, along with many others, are concerned that our food and agriculture systems are not sustainable. Natural resource depletion, including diversity loss, changing diets, population increases and urbanization are changing what we produce, market and consume. The EAT Forum, initiated by the Norwegian Stordalen Foundation and the Stockholm Resilience Centre, is focussing our thoughts and efforts.

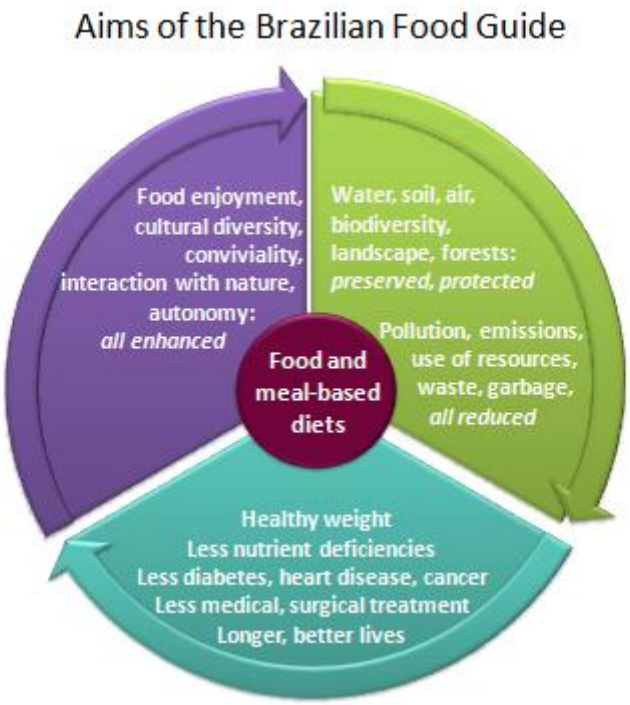


EAT. Master of ceremonies Richard Horton of The Lancet sets the scene, at a vivid and memorable meeting with world-class gripping scenario, graphics, and projection

The Forum has been convened to see how science, business and politics can work for a world to sustain both ourselves and the planet. This is not only a first world issue Dyborn Charlie Chibonga of the National Smallholder Farmers' Association of Malawi spoke of the consequences of diversity loss, soil degradation and the need to support smallholders and the landscape in which they coexist. He described making agriculture and rural life better and the need to attract young people to nurture the food culture and the environment on which it depends. His message was echoed by Ron Finley, speaking on the food deserts of cities like Los Angeles where urban inner-city agriculture is changing the food they eat and their lives



EAT. Opening keynote speaker Bill Clinton explains his commitment and that of his Foundation to sustainable food systems and citizens' movements for healthy nutrition



EAT. Keynote speaker Carlos Monteiro here projected the vision of food and meal-based diets that are healthy in all ways, personally, socially, environmentally, always

President Clinton spoke about a world of shared prosperity, dignity and respect including for the smallholder farmer as the custodian of a challenged ecosystem. He spoke of his personal transformation. His testimony was compelling and genuine. Prince Charles, a long-time champion for sustainable agriculture, spoke about the need for full cost accounting to stimulate a better business case for sustainable food systems. He set a challenge for: 'The urgent need to develop and bring to scale food production systems which benefit not only human health but the health of the wider environment and critical ecosystems on which our futures ultimately depend'

The work continues. The Daniel and Nina Carasso Foundation has established an panel of experts on sustainable food systems. The Panel will be co-chaired by Dr Olivia Yambi, former UNICEF representative in Kenya, and Olivier de Schutter, who has just completed his six year term as UN Special Rapporteur on the right to food.

Bioversity International

Bruce Cogill writes: My organisation, Bioversity International, is part of the CGIAR research programme on agriculture for nutrition and health. We research and promote sustainable food systems, including how to make agriculture nutrition-sensitive. This involves building diversity into landscapes and food systems to provide multiple sources of nutrients and vital ecosystem services. We work with strategic partners including the Carasso Foundation.

*Cogill B. the EAT Forum. Public Health Nutrition. The point has tipped [Update]. World Nutrition June 2014, **5**, 6, 519-521*



Big Food Watch

World Cup: Big Macs win most, lose some

Access August 2012 Association news story on McDonald's and the Olympics here
Access April 2014 Update on McDonald's in Vietnam here

The Big Food Watch team reports:





McDonald's mascot children will accompany the players on to the World Cup pitches in Brazil this month. The visibility, publicity and credibility has been valued at hundreds of millions of dollars

In Brazil this June and July, 1,400 children aged between 6 and 10 will act as mascots, walking on to the pitches with the players from the 32 World Cup countries. This begins on Thursday 12 June and continues until the final match on Sunday 13 July at the Maracana stadium in Rio de Janeiro. Above is what the children will look like, as shown on McDonald's and other websites. They will be advertisements for McDonald's burgers and fries, plus Coca-Cola from an even bigger Big Food corporate investor in the Brazilian World Cup. Competitions for children to be selected have been run in national newspapers all over the world.

As a 'sponsor' of the World Cup, McDonald's pays the controlling body FIFA (the International Federation of Association Football) a sum believed to be at the top end of $US 10-25 million a year. The value to McDonald's of the child mascot scheme in visibility, publicity and credibility is alone estimated at over $US 100 million. The World Cup has six top 'partners' each paying $US 24-44 million a year, one of which is Coca-Cola. Profits of the World Cup that will go to FIFA, much of which is paid out by FIFA to football governing bodies and clubs throughout the world, are expected to exceed $US 2 billion. The senior executives of FIFA are on salaries in the millions.
Stories of kick-backs and bribes are constantly being reported, most recently as the explanation of the award of the 2022 World Cup to Qatar. It is estimated that 4,000

Qatar stadium site workers, mostly from India and Nepal, will die. Coke comments that such stories are not good for the sport. McDonald's has not commented. In 2013 Gulf Coast countries had around 350 McDonald's outlets, with revenue increasing by 15-20 per cent a year and 550 outlets projected for 2015.

Katia Porzecanski reports:



McDonald's workers in Brazil sued the company for the right to eat Brazilian food while working shifts. They won! Now rice and beans are available for customers too – but only 'under the counter'

After employees who rejected its regular menu of hamburgers and french fries on work breaks filed a complaint to prosecutors, McDonald's restaurants in Brazil are required by law to provide traditional Brazilian meals. These don't appear on behind-the-counter menu displays at the 816 McDonald's in Brazil, but are available to customers who ask for the *pratos executivos* (business dishes). This avoids complaints that the outlets are serving employees special meals customers can't buy. 'Rice and beans meals better satisfy hunger' says Tamires Honorato, a 19-year-old cashier at a McDonald's restaurant in Barueri, near São Paulo. 'And it's more like the meals we eat at home. People don't have hamburgers every day.'

'It's important to understand that the routine diet of a worker doesn't come only from inside a McDonald's restaurant,' a McDonald's press office in Brazil said in an e-mailed response to questions. 'All meals should be balanced, and people should engage in physical activities'. The *pratos executives* list is stashed under the counter until requested, and looks just like the regular menu, including the company's logo on the top. In addition to rice and beans, each meal comes with a choice of chicken, fish or beef, a salad; water or juice, and an apple for dessert. In São Paulo, the meal costs 23 *reais*, the equivalent of $US 10, which is 4 reais more than the Big Mac meal.

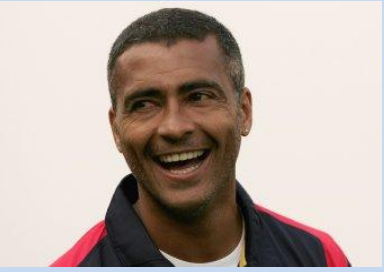
McDonald's has run into trouble before over Big Macs and fries. In 2010, a Brazilian court in the southern state of Rio Grande do Sul ordered the company to pay $US 14,000 to a former manager who said he gained about 66 pounds (30 kilos) in a decade while working at a McDonald's, court documents show. Then a 2012 agreement with prosecutors to settle a six-year-old investigation required the McDonald's chief Latin American operator, *Arcos Dourados* (Golden Arches), to provide traditional meals at no cost for their employees in order to claim tax breaks. The original complaint from the union representing 30,000 McDonald's employees in the state of São Paulo said Big Macs and the rest of the food they were offered while on break weren't healthy.

'We have a philosophy to be very transparent, so what we serve internally, we serve to our customers as well, and vice versa,' Ana Apolaro, the human resources director at the Buenos Aires-based Arcos Dorados, the world's biggest McDonald's operator, said when interviewed. 'But it's not our marketing strategy to sell rice and beans. You surely will not be seeing advertisements for them on television'.

Box 1

Brazil's schoolchildren need lunch





Romário, reckoned to be the greatest living Brazilian goal-scorer after Pelé, member of the World Cup winners of 1994, now a Rio de Janeiro congressman who is bitterly hostile to FIFA

Armed police confronted protestors in Brasília against World Cup profiteering at the end of May. Brazilian football champion Romário explains. The Brazilian government has spent an unknown sum reckoned to be around $US 7 billion building and renovating vast stadiums and local superstructure much of which will be underused after the World Cup has ended, out of a total cost to Brazilian taxpayers of around $US 15 billion. Nationally perhaps 150,000 *favela* dwellers have been evicted to make way for the World Cup.

'You see hospitals with no beds; you see hospitals with people on the floor' says Romário. 'You see schools that don't have lunch for kids; you see schools with no air-conditioning...You see buildings and schools with no accessibility for people who are handicapped'. He sees FIFA as a cash-grabber, invested nothing in Brazil 'They don't care about what is going to be left behind'. In Britain he is supported by leading Guardian columnist Simon Jenkins.

*Big Food Watch team. World Cup. McDonald's win most, lose some [Update] World Nutrition June 2014, **5**, 6, 522-524*



Big Food Watch

Using the law to protect children's rights by prohibiting all commercial propaganda

Access May 2014 open letter from 47 organisations in support of CONANDA here
Access May 2014 BFW Fabio Gomes on open letter to Mexican President here
Access May 2014 BFW Isabela Sattamini on CONANDA here

idec
Instituto Brasileiro de Defesa do Consumidor

Fabio Gomes and Isabela Sattamini report:

The defence of the rights of children and adolescents is now a battleground in Brazil. The whole world is watching what will happen. This is because (as reported in *WN Big Food Watch* in May), the Brazilian federal agency formally responsible for the protection of children's rights has ruled that all advertising and marketing and other commercial communications of all types aimed at children up to the age of 12 is inherently abusive, irrespective of the messages, and is prohibited. This cuts through all questions of bad or good content. The ruling is that all advertising to children is wrong, because of their vulnerability to propaganda.

The Brazilian Children and Adolescents Rights National Council (CONANDA), the agency, has special powers. Like other agencies set up under the Constitution of 1988 defining Brazil as a participatory democracy, it includes government official and non-government representatives, and reports directly to the office of the President.

Commercially interested parties including manufacturers of ultra-processed food products, advertising and publicity agencies, and the media supported by advertising, are up in arms. They state that their own self-regulation is adequate and that CONANDA anyway does not have the competence or powers to enact or enforce statutory regulation. The issue is big, because it has global implications.

In support of the CONANDA decision, the Brazilian Institute for Consumer Defence (IDEC – logo above) has co-ordinated an open letter which, at the time of writing, has been signed by 47 Brazilian and international organisations. The text of the letter with its signatories *in Portuguese is available here.* For the English version, see Box 1 below.

Box 1

Propaganda to children must stay prohibited

This open letter is so far signed by 45 Brazilian and international organisations. Here is a translation in English. The Portuguese text, with the signatories, can be accessed here

We support CONANDA Resolution No. 163/2014. This identifies all advertising and marketing aimed at children as inherently abusive. It sets out general and legal principles to be applied to such communications targeted at adolescents. It expects that these norms will be respected by all concerned.

Propaganda aimed at children violates their right to be respected, and their state as people in process of development and therefore more vulnerable to persuasion pressure. Further, promotion of food products and drinks high in sugar, fat or sodium targeted at children contributes to increasing levels of childhood obesity by stimulating excessive and frequent consumption of these products, thus jeopardising children's right to health.

The Brazilian Children and Adolescents Rights National Council (CONANDA) is a public institution linked to the Human Rights Secretariat of the Presidency. It has in its jurisdiction, general norms for Brazil's national policies in its area of competence. Its constitution and composition ensures broad participation of civil society and government representatives. Therefore, the Council, by the approval of its position concerning the abusiveness of such commercial practices, by means of the Resolution No. 163/2014, is acting within its appointed area of competence and expertise and with the limits of its legal statutory duties.

In this matter, CONANDA has relied on legal provisions, national and international evidence, and justified public demands regarding greater childhood protection. This norm strengthens the already existing protection provided by law, guaranteed by the Federal Constitution, by the Children and Adolescent's Statute, and by the Code of Consumer Defence, and takes a decisive step forward towards consolidating citizenship and childhood rights.

Some interested organizations representing advertisers, advertising agencies, radio and television broadcasters, and others, have publicly positioned themselves against this Resolution. They argue in defence of self-regulation of the sector, and also argue that only a law approved by the National Congress (Parliament) could regulate this matter.

Self-regulation does not replace this current Resolution issued by CONANDA. Nor can self-regulation be considered sufficient to prevent abuses of marketing communication. Its rules, besides being set by some companies voluntarily, are only recommendations, do not reach all advertisers, and do not apply to all marketing communication strategies.

What is apparent in these arguments is disrespect for children's rights. The nature of the advertising and marketing produced by companies, advertising agencies and broadcasters suggests that they are well aware that children by their nature lack experience and judgement. They claim that there is no legal basis for the Resolution, while ignoring the Federal Constitution and existing norms of childhood protection. This is outrageous. Therefore, to uphold the whole and absolute protection of children's rights, the organisations listed here, emphatically support Resolution No. 163 CONANDA, in force since 4 April 2014.

*Gomes F, Sattamini I. Big Food Watchers. Using the law to protect children's rights by prohibiting all commercial propaganda. [Update]. World Nutrition June 2014, **5**, 6, 525-526*

Food systems

Canada as global super power

Access 2014 Canadian Food Strategy report here



Wheat and canola oil (pictures above) are the most valuable Canadian food exports. Genetically modified crops are grown (map below). Beans, peas, cattle, pork are also valuable Canadian exports

The Update team reports:

The Conference Board of Canada, the Ottawa-based leading non-government economic think-tank, has developed the *Canadian Food Strategy*, published in March (1:

> Canada's food sector has the potential to be among the foremost export industries for Canada, since worldwide demand will continue to rise for decades and few other countries have the potential capacity to satisfy the needs of these burgeoning markets. If we choose, Canada can move from being a top-20 net food exporter to be among the top 5 food exporting powers of the world – a global food super power.

This makes sense. After Russia, the countries with the largest land masses are Canada, the US and China, with Brazil some way behind. The southern provinces of Canada, including Newfoundland, Québec, Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta and British Columbia, all include vast areas of fertile farmland. Canadian wheat saved Britain from threatened starvation in the Second World War. In Canada now, 2.3 million jobs or 13 per cent of total are in the food industry, which contributes 8 per cent of gross domestic product.

Boom in plant oils

An outstanding example of success has been canola: seed oil for human food and meal for animal feed. Annual production has risen from 300,000 tonnes in 1972 to 7 million tonnes in 2012. Most oil and meal goes to the US, most seed to Mexico, Japan, China, India and Pakistan, for refining into oil and meal there.

> Canada is blessed with abundant natural resources that have already made us a highly successful food producer and exporter, increasing the size of our economy and giving jobs to hundreds of thousands. And the future holds much promise… global markets are filling with customers who can afford richer diets, more protein, and more calories that Canada can supply. The food sector … can become even larger if our producers capture a share of the growing international food market.

Currently the foods produced in Canada overall most financially valuable, are grains (wheat first, and corn, oats and barley); oilseeds (canola first, also linseed); pork, beef and dairy products, and fish; and pulses (notably peas, soybeans, lentils). Animal products are currently mostly for domestic consumption, although Canada is the world's fourth biggest exporter of fish. The major grains, oilseeds and pulses are mostly exported.

As incomes rise within middle- and lower-income countries, production and consumption of foods and products that are higher in protein and dietary energy – and in fats from oils such as canola and soy – are indeed increasing. But Canada would more deeply undermine the established food systems in Asia and Africa by ramping up its current exports of grains to countries in which wheat is not a natural staple. It would also contribute to what are now the rapidly rising rates of obesity in the global South by boosting its exports of plant oils used in the manufacture of energy-dense fatty or sugary ultra-processed products. Barry Popkin, an authority on global obesity, explains why populations within Asia and Africa are getting fat (2):

> It is commonly held that the westernization of the global diet continues to be associated with the increased consumption of animal fats. However, the nutrition transition in developing countries typically begins with major increases in the domestic production and imports of oil seeds and vegetable oils; rather than meat and milk. Principal vegetable oils include soybean, sunflower, rapeseed, palm, and groundnut oil. With the exception of groundnut oil, global availability of each approximately tripled between 1961 and 1990

The plan for Canada

The Conference Board, while formally a non-government organization, is funded by industry and government. Its mission is 'To make Canada's economy and society even more dynamic and competitive in an increasingly globalized and enterprising world' (3). Its main business is business. It supplies strategic reviews to government and industry for fees received. The *Canadian Food Strategy* is of special interest because of its 'champion' or 'partner' investors, who include Nestlé, PepsiCo, Parmalat, Heinz, Cott

(the brewers), and the Canadian-based grain and grocery corporation Weston-Loblaw and the dairy corporation Saputo. The current diet-related public health crisis in Canada is recognised. The solution suggested is information and education to encourage consumers to make wiser choices:

> Canadians suffer from rising rates of chronic diseases like heart disease, cancer, diabetes, and obesity, of which dietary patterns are a major contributing cause. This reduces people's quality of life and costs Canada's health care system billions of dollars each year. Growing rates of childhood obesity cut hopes for a long-term improvement. Canadians need to make the connection between diet and long-term health, encourage government and industry efforts to improve the food choice environment, and take responsibility for improving their own dietary behaviours.

Product reformulation, better labelling, and more physical activity, are proposed:

> Ramping up R&D to create or reformulate healthy food products… Food labelling is one key to helping consumers make healthy food choices. Other areas of emphasis include lowering consumption of *trans* fats, sodium, and sugar; linking dietary change with fitness and exercise programs.

Food regulation is accepted, as long as this is friendly to industry or originated by industry. The Strategy identifies the need to 'recognise private standards as having standing within the public regulatory regime'. Restriction of advertising to children is accepted, provided this is voluntary: 'Set stringent industry advertising guidelines to reduce the advertising of unhealthy foods to children'. National targets to reduce unhealthy food products are also accepted: 'Set national targets for lower consumption of *trans* fats, sodium, and sugar and engage industry cooperation to achieve targets. Develop healthier alternative and replacement ingredients'.

This all chimes with the policy of transnational corporations worldwide, with one addition – the need to reduce sugar consumption. The transnationals apparently are now prepared to yield a little on sugar, in response to the current uproar against added sugars and syrups – as long as they set the standards, reformulate their products in convenient ways, and report progress that is good for their bottom lines.

References

1 The Conference Board of Canada. *Canadian Food Strategy. From Opportunity to Achievement.* Ottawa: CBC, March 2014. *Access pdf here*

2 Popkin B. The nutrition transition and the global shift towards obesity. *Diabetes Voice* 2004, **39**, 3, 38-40. http://www.idf.org/sites/default/files/ attachments /article_299_en.pdf

3 The Conference Board of Canada. Sharing Our Impact, Annual report 2012-2013. http://www.conferenceboard.ca/Libraries/PUBLIC_PDFS/cboc-ar-2013-en.sflb

Anon. Food systems. Canada as global super power
*World Nutrition June 2014, **5**, 6, 527-529*



Childhood and adolescent obesity

PAHO-WHO sets targets

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 Roberto de Vogli on deregulation and obesity here
Access June 2014 PAHO plan to end child and adolescent obesity in English here
Access June 2014 PAHO plan to end child and adolescent obesity in Spanish here
Access this issue Farming Enrique Jacoby et al on family farming here



A mother breastfeeds her child, in Lima, Peru. Extended exclusive breastfeeding is one of the many ways known to protect infants, children and adolescents against overweight, obesity and diabetes

The Update team reports:

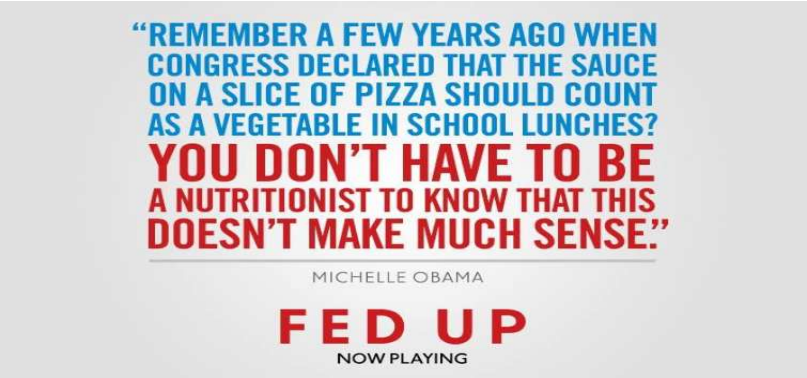
The war against obesity and the causes of obesity in Latin America, and the Americas as a whole, gets hotter. On 16-20 at their annual executive meeting, member states of the Pan-American Health Organization will discuss and debate a remarkable comprehensive five-year plan of action to check and prevent obesity in young life. The plan is available in *English here* and in *Spanish here.* The plan states that the driving forces of obesity are first and second, energy-dense snack products, and sweetened soft drinks, and then also physical inactivity. Strategic areas of action, with clearly specified quantified targets for outcomes and number of countries, start with breastfeeding; healthy food and drink and exercise from pre-school to university; and fiscal policies and regulation of product advertising and marketing.

WN will report in the next issue on decisions taken at the PAHO meeting.

*The Update team. Childhood and adolescent obesity. PAHO-WHO sets targets [Update]. World Nutrition June 2014, **5**, 6, 530*

Child nutrition

Michelle Obama says junk the junk



Editor's note

Michelle Obama's *Let's Move* campaign has been strongly criticised, including in the *Fed Up* movie, for unduly stressing physical activity and implying that overweight and obesity are caused by being lazy. Now she has bitten back, in *The New York Times* on 28 May. See also the *Update* before this one on ending obesity in the Americas. No more nice First Lady!

Michelle Obama writes:

When we began our *Let's Move* initiative four years ago, we set one simple but ambitious goal: to end the epidemic of childhood obesity in a generation. We have adhered to one clear standard: what works. The initiatives we undertake are evidence-based, and we rely on the most current science. Research indicated that kids needed less sugar, salt and fat in their diets, so we revamped school lunch menus accordingly. When data showed that the lack of nearby grocery stores negatively affected people's eating habits, we worked to get more fresh-food retailers into under-served areas.

Today, we are seeing glimmers of progress. Tens of millions of kids are getting better nutrition in school; families are thinking more carefully about food they eat, cook and buy; companies are rushing to create healthier products to meet the growing demand; and the obesity rate is finally beginning to fall from its peak among our youngest children. But we're now seeing attempts in Congress to undo so much of what we've accomplished on behalf of our children. Take the Women, Infants and Children programme, known as WIC. This is a federal programme designed to provide supplemental nutrition to low-income women and their babies and toddlers. The idea is to fill in the gaps in their diets, to help them buy items like fresh produce that they can't afford on their own, and give them the nutrition they're missing.

Right now, the House of Representatives is considering a bill to override science by mandating that white potatoes be included on the list of foods that women can purchase using WIC dollars. Now, there is nothing wrong with potatoes. The problem

is that many women and children already consume enough potatoes and not enough of the nutrient-dense fruits and vegetables they need. That's why the Institute of Medicine, the nonpartisan, scientific body that advises on the standards for WIC, has said that potatoes should not be part of the WIC programme.

This isn't an isolated occurrence. We're seeing the same kind of scenario unfold with our school lunch programme. Back in 2010, Congress passed the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act, which set higher nutritional standards for school lunches, also based on recommendations from the Institute of Medicine. Today, 90 percent of schools report that they are meeting these new standards. As a result, kids are now getting more fruits, vegetables, whole grains and other foods they need to be healthy.

This is a big win for parents who are working hard to serve their kids balanced meals at home and don't want their efforts undermined during the day at school. And it's a big win for all of us since we spend more than $US 10 billion a year on school lunches and should not be spending those hard-earned taxpayer dollars on junk food for our children. Yet some members of the House of Representatives are now threatening to roll back these new standards. They want to make it optional, not mandatory, for schools to serve fruits and vegetables to our kids. They also want to allow more sodium and fewer wholegrains than recommended into school lunches.

Our children deserve so much better than this. One in three children in this country is still overweight or obese. One in three is expected to develop diabetes in his or her lifetime. And this isn't just about our children's health; it's about the health of our economy as well. We already spend an estimated $US 190 billion a year treating obesity-related conditions. Think about what those numbers will look like in a decade or two if we don't start solving this problem now. As parents, we put our children's interests first. We wake up and go to bed worrying about their well-being and their futures. And when we make decisions about our kids' health, we rely on doctors and experts who can give us accurate information based on sound science. Our leaders in Washington should do the same.

Obama M. Child nutrition. Michelle Obama says junk the junk [Update]. World Nutrition June 2014, ***5****, 6, 531-532*

How to respond

Updates are short communications designed to add new information to *WN* commentaries and other contributions. They are invited from all readers. We pay special attention to issues in less resourced countries and settings. Usual length for main text of *Updates* is between 500 and 1,500 words but they can be shorter or longer. References should usually be limited to up to 10. *Updates* are edited for length and style, may be developed, and once edited are sent to authors for approval. Address contributions to wn.updates@gmail.com