WN *Update*

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Big Food Watch. McDonald's
Ronald McDonald hits Ho Chi Minh City



BIG FOOD WATCH

Access August 2012 Association news story on McDonald's and the Olympics here



Girls lined up against the Golden Arches sign in Ho Chi Minh City, providing a photo opportunity at the opening of McDonald's first ever outlet in Vietnam. On the first day business was very brisk

Claudio Schuftan reports from Ho Chi Minh City:

On 8 February McDonald's opened its first burger joint in Vietnam, in my home town, Ho Chi Minh City. Neil Massey was there all day and his pictures are shown here. He says: 'The festivities included blaring techno, live bands, and thousands of customers waiting up to two hours in 90-degree heat. For the customers it's the aspirational experience that brings them through the doors. The average wage in Vietnam is about $US 150 a month and the cost of a Big Mac is $US 2.82 and a Value Meal is $US 3.99. So for an average worker, two Value Meals cost half a week's wages. For many Vietnamese, it's a special treat to bring the family to a place like this. Last year Vietnam relaxed its investment restrictions, and since then it has seen big brands like Burger King and Starbucks come into Vietnam. Starbucks was a big deal on its opening weekend, but nothing compared to this'.



Mother and child at the opening of the first McDonald's outlet in Vietnam, in Ho Chi Minh City. The balloons and music were free on this first day as middle-class customers got a taste of the USA

A colleague tells me that a study just published in the *British Medical Journal* has found that 'Exposure to takeaway food outlets in home, work, and commuting environments combined was associated with marginally higher consumption of takeaway food, greater body mass index, and greater odds of obesity'. Just fancy that!

With transnational corporations poised for 'double- digit' 10 per cent + annual sales increases, obesity and diabetes rates are projected to rise fast, which will be good business for pharmacies and hospitals. Here follows an extract from a report in *USA Today* of the Ho Chi Minh City opening:

> The businessman who brought McDonald's to Vietnam, developmental licensee Henry Nguyen, born in Vietnam but grew up in the US, is married to the daughter of prime minister Nguyen Tan Dung. He said that one reason it took McDonald's so long to come to Vietnam is that: 'McDonald's is a very careful organization. If you show up in a market you've got to do things right. The food standards have got to be there, so supply chain was definitely an issue. McDonald's plans a target of 100 restaurants in 10 years. The biggest challenges will be training the workforce and creating a supply chain that will meet international standards. We're going to change the food industry here.'
>
> For now most Vietnamese customers still eat out in small local shops such as Pho Loc, which sells Vietnam's popular pho noodle soup only a few hundred feet down the street from the new McDonald's. Tran Ngoc Anh, 63, has been running the restaurant for 30 years and said she isn't worried that the new giant down the street will draw away her customers. 'It's just fast food' she said. 'It doesn't have all the delicious flavors of pho'.



Ronald McDonald and a local companion celebrate the opening of the 10,000th Big Mac joint in Asia, in Ho Chi Minh City. Density of fast food outlets is a reliable predictor of rates of obesity

Box 1

McDonald's in Asia

Summarised from a report in USA Today

For Oak Brook, Illinois -based McDonald's, Vietnam is one of its largest remaining untapped markets, a country with 90 million people and a growing middle class that is able to afford fast food, which is typically more expensive than local street food. At McDonald's, a Big Mac costs 60,000 Vietnamese dong ($US 2.82), while a value meal with fries and a drink goes for 85,000 Vietnamese dong ($US 3.99).

According to Euromonitor International, Vietnam's fast-food industry is growing rapidly. Total revenues were $US 535 million in 2013, a growth of 14.5 per cent over 2012. The first foreign fast-food chain to enter Vietnam was Kentucky Fried Chicken in 1997, after the Vietnamese government agreed to 'normalise' trade relations with other countries and, more to the point, with transnational corporations. Currently KFC remains the largest brand in Vietnam, with 135 locations.

In recent years the market has grown more crowded as several US.-based fast-food chains have made the leap into Vietnam. Burger King arrived in 2011, and has expanded quickly, with almost 20 restaurants in Ho Chi Minh City, Hanoi and Danang. Other recent entrants include Baskin-Robbins, Dairy Queen, Carl's Jr., Popeyes Louisiana Kitchen and Subway. Starbucks opened its first store in 2013, and now has three locations in Ho Chi Minh City.

Vietnam is the 38th country that McDonald's has entered in Asia, and the Ho Chi Minh City restaurant is the region's 10,000th McDonald's location. The company has more than 35,000 restaurants worldwide.

*Schuftan C. Big Food Watch. McDonald's. Ronald McDonald hits Ho Chi Minh City [Update]. World Nutrition April 2014, **5**,4, 311-313*

China. Obesity, chronic diseases. World Bank
The fat face of 'development'



BIG FOOD WATCH

Access 2011 World Bank report on health and harmony in China here



Once upon a time the Chinese authorities and people were guided by Chairman Mao's little red book. Now the great helmsman in China is Ronald McDonald. Rates of obesity and diabetes are rocketing

Our news team in Asia reports from Beijing:

About 200 million Chinese are now overweight or obese. A World Bank report (1) states that prevalence among children is already higher than in some high-income countries. Rates of diabetes and heart disease are rising. Between 1979 and 2004, adult hypertension rose from 7.5 to 18.1 per cent. Between the 1980s and 2007, diabetes increased by a factor of 25, from 0.67 per cent to 10 per cent. The World Bank offers solutions. Referring to the WHO report on *Inequalities in Health*, and a Finnish study, it says rather audaciously, 'At the international level there is agreement on an effective set of policy options and interventions for tackling NCDs effectively', and offers the Chinese authorities some 'short and medium term' options:

> Health in All Policies. HiAP seeks to improve health and contribute to the well-being and wealth of nations through structures, mechanisms, and actions planned and managed mainly by sectors other than health, because improved health status of the population has, in turn, important effects on the realization of social and economic objectives.
>
> Fiscal and regulatory measures: These measures include pricing policies; marketing of healthy products such as fruits and vegetables; and increasing the social and economic costs of unhealthy products (eg cigarettes, alcohol, and fast food for children).

The report alludes to the fact that costs of disease treatment have rocketed in China in the new 'market' system which requires people to be insured or to pay full costs of drugs, surgery and other treatment. As a result the health care economy in China is booming, and lower income families with members suffering chronic diseases are becoming destitute. The World Bank offers:

> Health sector actions: The health sector needs to be restructured to adopt novel care organization and financial models with a strong primary health care system that is structured for delivery of well defined, integrated NCD care and that creates an enabling environment for individuals to assume greater responsibility for their own health by making informed, healthier choices.

Whatever that may mean. One of the many contexts relevant to the state of health in China not mentioned in the report, is the parallel rocketing increase in China of fast food chains operated by transnational corporations, such as McDonald's. See Box 1.

Box 1

McDonald's in China

Summarised and edited from a Daily Telegraph report



Tim Fenton, McDonald's Asia, Middle East, Africa president, here in 2010 seen launching HU, the McDonald's Hamburger University, in Shanghai. China is McDonald's boom market

China is McDonald's fastest-growing global market. Its $US 300 billion 'informal eating out' market is expanding at an annual rate of 10 per cent, compared with 2-3 per cent in the US. McDonald's has more than 60,000 employees in more than 1,100 outlets in mainland China after 20 years in the country and plans to double to 2,000+ outlets in 3-5 years. Hamburger University, located in an industrial park in the Shanghai suburbs, aims to have 5,000 graduates over the next five years, HU courses may earn college credit and the company says graduates use such schools as a springboard to pursue college degrees. 'We will do our best to be the Harvard for our industry' said the school's dean, Susanna Li.

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Anon. China. Obesity, chronic diseases. World Bank. The fat face of development [Update] World Nutrition April 2014, 5, 4, 314-315

Big Food Watch. US Institute of Medicine
The curious case of Victor Dzau



Access March 2014 Update on the curious case of the carbohydrate committee here
Access this issue Commentary on Big Sugar and the corridors of power

Our Big Food Watch team reports:

Victor Dzau of Duke University, North Carolina, in February was appointed president of the US Institute of Medicine, of which he has been a member since 1998. The IOM advises the US government on food and nutrition. The IOM did not disclose that as well as his work at Duke, Victor Dzau has since 2005 been a director of Pepsi-Co, with a salary in 2009 of $US 260,000, and holds Pepsi shares valued at $US 2,830,537. The disclosure was made by an investigative journalist (1). It is now stated that he will resign from PepsiCo. No statement has been made on his shareholdings.

In 2002 the US Department of Agriculture issued new dietary guidance, based on an IOM report. These included a figure for sugar of up to 25 per cent of total energy intake. The usual figure is 10 per cent. Nutrition labels in the US state that there is no 'daily value' for sugar intake, which in effect suggests that 'anything goes'. It is not suggested that the 25 per cent figure was influenced by Victor Dzau or any other IOM member. Rather, critics point out that the IOM depends on corporate donors. In 2012 these included Cargill, Coca-Cola, Kellogg's, Kraft, Monsanto, and PepsiCo (2). Some members of the panel responsible for the report have links with the sugar industry.

But the issue is not individual, it is systematic and endemic. In the US, science and industry work as partners and conflicts of interest are usually considered unimportant or else resolved by disclosure. Universities and academic departments depend on corporate funding; much of this comes from industries most interested in the results.

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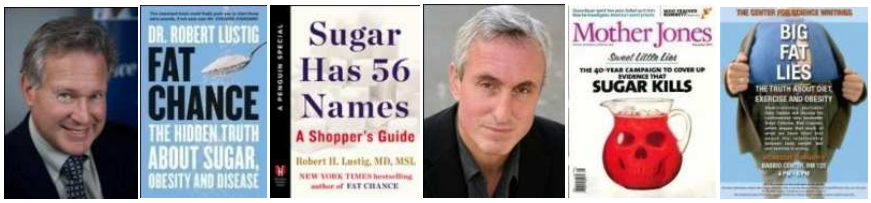


Sugar

Robert Lustig plays hardball

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

Our Big Sugar team reports:



Robert Lustig terrorises the sugar industry. He now has an institute dedicated to demonising added sugars and eliminating diabesity. Fellow ferocious opponent of sugar Gary Taubes has similar ideas

Robert Lustig of the University of California at San Francisco (above, left) has made a new move. He is the most vociferous and influential opponent of sugars and syrups in processed food, in the US and now worldwide. He combines publication of hard-hitting papers in scientific and academic journals, leadership in the American Heart Association, with fervent advocacy. Like past pioneers *John Yudkin and TL Cleave,* he sees sugars and syrups as contained notably in ultra-processed products including cola (soda) and other sugared soft drinks, as a main cause of the multi-organ disease, the metabolic syndrome. He is an advisor to the UK-based *Action on Sugar,* but his views and plans in this and other ways are much *more radical than those of AoS.*

He is on a roll. He has an immense following. His 90 minute blistering attack 'Sugar: the Bitter Truth', first broadcast in 2009, had by the end of March been accessed over 4,500,000 times. His two books (above) are best-sellers. In common with other US heavy hitters, he believes that government and the scientific establishment is not able or willing to reverse the epidemic of obesity and diabetes. He sees why, too. The US government remains committed to a deregulated industry, and in the US many nutrition researchers are funded directly or indirectly by or have ties with conflicted industry. Here is what he says about manufacturers and their impact.

'They're making money, hand over fist, making processed foods that are virtually almost free to them to produce. There is tremendous profit to them… It's 10 cents on the dollar for food, 15 cents for the packaging. It's 20 cents on the dollar for marketing and 55 cents for their profit. So they have every reason to keep doing what

they're doing because this is their juggernaut. The problem is that it's killing us'. So for his new move. With colleagues including influential writer and advocate Raj Patel, he has now set up the Institute for Responsible Nutrition (1). Its founders include a banker and a venture capitalist. Its declared immediate mission is to reverse childhood obesity and diabetes.

This follows a similar move by Gary Taubes (above right, with two of his manifestations). He has already co-founded the Nutrition Science Initiative (NuSI) with $2.5 million seed money and ten times that earmarked from the Laura and John Arnold Foundation, itself funded by retired hedge fund billionaire John Arnold. NuSI is described grandly as 'An X-men-like group of the world's best scientists, independently funded and uninfluenced by industry, tackling the most important questions in industry' It is also called 'a Manhattan Project of nutrition research', for which Gary Taubes, his colleagues and the investigators they fund would overall need something in the region of half a trillion dollars (2).

The attack on sugar gains momentum

Robert Lustig and Gary Taubes are belligerent. They are not alone. The US-based onslaught on sugar gains momentum. Most leaders are bloggers from allied groups – the 'no-carb' warriors; investigators sure that Ancel Keys got it all wrong; the wholefood brigade; parents and others convinced that sugar is addictive; 'locovores' and Food Milers; and Big Food assailants. The big hitters have mostly been journalists and authors who are not academically qualified, notably Gary Taubes, Michael Moss, and Michael Pollan. In the *UK Action on Sugar* is making waves

Now the game is changing. Until recently, nutrition and allied scientists have, with exceptions, kept quiet about sugar. Now a number of leading researchers have gone public and gained traction. These include Kelly Brownell, until recently at Yale, whose approach is political; David Ludwig of the Harvard School of Public Health; and Nora Volkow, director of the US National Institute on Drug Abuse, who has proved that the impact of some including sugared products on the brain is the same as that of drugs like cocaine. To be continued, in *Update* and elsewhere in *WN*.

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*Anon. Sugar. Robert Lustig plays hardball [Update]. World Nutrition April 2014, **5**, 4, 317-318*

Transnational corporations

Casino capitalists win and take all

Access Transnational Institute report on corporate power here



Susan George reports:

The UN now has a special section for corporations called the 'Global Compact', announced in 1999 by Kofi Annan and the then President of Nestlé. To become a member, a corporation signs on to support 15 principles in the areas of human or labour rights and the environment. Although they are supposed to supply progress reports, the UN never monitors them.

The corporations that belong to the Global Compact, plus the members of the World Business Council for Sustainable Development, and various other business associations or chambers of commerce, were massively present at Rio+20, the UN's jamboree environmental conference, in the summer of 2012. Business formed the largest delegation and staged the largest event, known as 'Business Day'. Here the permanent representative of the International Chamber of Commerce to the United Nations (yes, like a country's permanent representative) declared to thunderous applause 'We are…the largest business delegation ever to attend a UN Conference… Business needs to take the lead and we are taking the lead'.

Transnational corporations are now demanding a formal role in UN Climate negotiations. Thus, the November 2013 UN Climate Conference in Warsaw was plastered with the logos of many fossil fuel and mining companies, as well as those of the Emirates airline, General Motors and BMW. The Polish government seized the occasion to host a parallel conference of the World Coal Association. Here the top UN Climate Conference official Christiana Figueres gave a keynote speech. Well done, transnational corporations!

The enemies of public goods

The lobbying or 'public relations' industry grew exponentially after World War II and now has experts in defending the interests of all industrial sectors, including junk food, genetically manipulated crops, harmful products like tobacco, dangerous chemicals or dicey pharmaceuticals, the biggest greenhouse gas emitters and the financial industry. Their mission is clear: write new legislation; hold up or eliminate any legislation that might be counter to those interests.

Less known perhaps than the lobbies for individual transnational corporations are the proliferating industry-wide 'institutes', 'foundations', 'centres' or 'councils', for various classes of products, often based in Washington DC but sometimes operating worldwide. They too defend alcohol, tobacco, junk food, chemicals, pharmaceuticals, greenhouse gas emitters and so on, but go about it differently, often using ideological weapons. They employ tame scientists, who never declare any conflict of interest, to write 'studies' or popular articles aimed at creating doubt in the public's mind about even the best established scientific facts. They claim that there is 'debate' around certain scientific issues when in fact there is none – or only that created out of thin air by the lobbyists themselves.

They set up fake 'grass-roots' or 'citizens' groups to defend their products or ideas and pretend that the consumer's 'freedom to choose' is being infringed by the 'nanny State' that wants to make people's decisions for them. They have launched petitions and collected signatures to defend or reject a policy; on closer examination, the signatures turn out to be those of corporate employees whose jobs depend on agreeing. They use scare-mongering techniques such as 'this legislation will increase costs for business and lead to higher prices and/or unemployment'. They are also expert in framing the issues so that they can be passed off as legitimate 'news' when in fact they are propaganda operations. One must take care to find out who funds a seemingly benign and legitimate institution before believing anything it says and this is not a simple task for the ordinary citizen.

Creating doubt in the public mind is usually sufficient to reach their ends. The Center for Consumer Freedom under the direction of the accomplished PR guru Richard Berman was able to put off controls on smoking in public places for years. Berman has also defended the alcoholic drink and junk food industries as well as preparing anti-union campaigns for large corporations.

The climate-change denialists use the same tactics. One of their organisations funded by the petroleum and motor industries even announced on their site after the failure of the UN Copenhagen climate conference in 2009 that they were disbanding, considering that they had accomplished their purpose. And in many ways they have – there is far less media coverage and, at least in the United States, less public concern about climate change than before 2009.

Who governs?

Democratic legitimacy implies popular sovereignty, otherwise known as the consent of the governed. The people are supposed to be the ultimate arbiters: they must possess the right and capacity to say 'No' as well as 'Yes' to government policies.

It is not exactly news that governments have always governed on behalf of certain class interests. But this is different from allowing those interests to actually write the legislation and to make policy directly, including budgetary, financial, labour, social and environmental policy, in place of elected legislators and civil servants. It is different from allowing corporations to disseminate deception and lies and to undermine the public's right to know. It is also different from allowing such interests to replace the established judiciary with *ad hoc* courts in areas such as trade dispute arbitration, even in jurisdictions where the justice system is known to be fair and independent.

How can the people remain or become sovereign, if they are in no position even to identify who, or what, is making the decisions that affect their lives? In no way has democracy kept up with the pace of globalisation. Authority is exercised without the consent of the governed. Corporations have and use power without responsibility. Voters can sanction governments and throw them out of office, but corporations are not only beyond popular reach through votes but also collect egregious privileges such as 'personhood' in the US or full status in the UN.

It's not just their size, their enormous wealth and assets that make transnational corporations dangerous to democracy. It's also their concentration, their capacity to influence and often infiltrate governments, and their ability to defend their commercial interests against the common good. They share a common language, a common ideology and common ambitions. Their overall goals are not simply to earn higher profits, although the bottom line remains paramount. They are also seeking to provide a new kind of legitimacy for the alternative system they are putting in place, run entirely by themselves. They are also determined to demolish the public interest, public service, the welfare State and the common good, in favour of higher corporate gains in terms of both money and power and rules tailored for corporate purposes. Citizens who value democracy ignore them at their peril.

Editor's note

Update carries briefings from and links to organisations whose work is relevant to that of public health and nutrition. This is an extract from a chapter in *State of Power 2014*, from the Transnational Institute, of which Susan George is a founder. She is author of *How the Other Half Dies* (Penguin, 1975) whose subtitle is *The Real Reasons for World Hunger*

*George S. Transnational corporations. Casino capitalists win and take all [Update]. World Nutrition April 2014, **5**, 4, 319-321*

Institutional food. Military

Tanked up, immortal pizza, Keys rations

Access this month's update on McDonald's in China here



The Chinese people are getting bigger – taller and fatter. This includes the army. Tank crews are now not able to get in or out. The authorities have ordered bigger tanks and more physical activity

The Update team reports:

The Chinese People's Liberation Army is getting too big for its boots – literally. In common with the general population, Chinese soldiers are becoming bigger – taller and fatter (1). As a result, a lot of soldiers struggle to get in or out of their tanks, and a lot of airmen no longer fit into the cockpits of fighter planes. The PLA is 'upgrading' its equipment, and planning bigger and roomier tanks and planes for bigger soldiers. Comments from China are defensive. Jiang Lianju of the China Academy of Military Sciences says that supersized soldiers are a 'very minor consideration', and military analyst Ni Lexiong says that 'Choosing tank operators is like choosing weightlifters – both require men to be short and quick'. A comment from J Brookes Spector of *The Daily Maverick* is 'Maybe America's real secret weapon will turn out to have been a steady diet of the Big Macs and Happy Meals now available throughout China'.

Box 1

The Mars Bar crisis

Geoffrey Cannon comments: It's the same elsewhere. The Scottish physiologist John Durnin, an authority on metabolism and energy expenditure, was a hush-hush advisor to the British navy. He told me this was a result of a submariner crisis, which he solved. During long under-sea tours of duty, crews played cards and ate burgers and confectionery such as Mars Bars. Docked after three months they could not get out of the submarine hatch. Faced with the prospect of having to use massive versions of tin-openers, the navy called John in. He prescribed press-ups and porridge. After a month the men could wriggle out.

Long-life meals for men at war



Field rations for US soldiers now. The whole 'dinner' package of packages includes a 'flameless heater'. With water added it heats up powder into pasta with vegetable crumbles and tomato sauce

All round the world, soldiers in well-equipped armies have plenty to eat in what the US army calls 'D-facs' – dining facilities. And their 'MREs' ('meals, ready to eat') are carefully formulated to contain enough dietary energy plus the various essential nutrients. Some items are food technology marvels adapted from spaceman products. The MREs are made up from ready-to-eat or -heat long-life products – sometimes longer-lived than the soldiers in a war zone like Afghanistan. The field rations for a day for US soldiers above and UK soldiers below are two of 11from the armies of different countries *collected for The Guardian* in Kabul (1). Most MREs may train young soldiers for a lifetime of eating ready-to-consume ultra-processed products.



Field rations for UK soldiers. Lots of branded products. Main courses here are chicken tikka, and vegetarian pasta. Also pork and beans and lots of sweet snacks like those children take to school

Immortal pizza



Prototypes of pizza that is just as tasty after three years, on display at the US Army exposition in Washington DC, as developed for the Defense Department's Combat Feeding Directorate. Yummy!

'When you're in the deployed environment' (at war) 'it tends to be fear and the monotonous', says Bill Bigelow, Director of US Army Materiel Command. 'So the only thing you have to look forward to is the chow. And if it's monotonous chow, that just adds to your misery. But when you get something to look forward to, like a slice of pizza, after you've been out all day on patrol ... it's a taste of home'. It is a little hard to believe that while being shot at and blown up by ferocious Afghans, US soldiers think about a slice of pizza in their next MRE, but Colonel Bill is the expert.

The 'holy grail' for US army food technologists has been 'immortal pizza'. Normally the moisture in tomato sauce and toppings soon makes the crust soggy and mouldy. The answer has been humectants that bind to water, such as sugar, syrup and salt. Acid balance is tweaked to discourage bacteria, and iron fillings are added. And lo, the prototype is shown above and below. Soldiers can expect this treat in three years' time. Many ultra-processed products were invented or developed for soldiers or citizens in wartime, and many products made for spacemen and soldiers are prototypes for consumers. Anticipate immortal pizza in supermarkets before 2020.



Food technologist Tom Yang (left) cuts a prototype very long life pizza at the US Army Soldier Research, Development and Engineering Center, in Natick, Massachusetts. Right, is the result

The Keys rations



Meals, ready to eat, for the US GI in the Second World War, devised by Ancel Keys (some say hence 'K' rations) from supermarket products. The results, above, turned out often to be a disaster

In 1941, as the US entered the Second World War, physiologist Ancel Keys of the University of Minnesota was asked by the US army authorities to devise field rations. He went to his local supermarket, picked out dry sausages, biscuits, chocolate, candy bars and some other items, checked their chemical content, achieved what he judged to be a balanced 3,200 calories weighing 870 grams, and tried the result out on 6 soldiers. The resulting 'K rations' with some modifications were issued on a mass scale to soldiers in the field as from 1942 – see below for the initial menu. Yummy!

> Breakfast unit: canned veal, biscuits, dextrose or malted milk tablets, dried fruit bar or pre-mixed oatmeal cereal, water purification tablets, instant coffee, sugar, chewing gum, 4-pack of cigarettes. Dinner unit: canned luncheon meat, biscuits, malted milk tablets, sugar, salt, powdered packet drink, chewing gum, 4-pack of cigarettes.. Supper unit: canned meat, biscuits, chocolate, chewing gum, 4-pack of cigarettes.

The rations were meant to be consumed only for short periods. When men in the field in the tropics subsisted on them they caused severe weight loss, deficiency diseases and increased infections. In the 1950s Ancel Keys went on to propose the theory that saturated fat is the main dietary cause of heart disease.

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*Anon. Institutional food. Military. Tanked up, immortal pizza, Keys rations [Update]. World Nutrition April 2014, **5**, 4, 322-325*



Big Food Watch network member

Flavio Valente. FIAN International





Editor's note

In this issue of *WN* we profile another member of the *Big Food Watch* network. Flavio Valente is secretary-general of FIAN International (formerly Food First Information and Action Network), with affiliated group and personal members in over 50 countries. He is a Brazilian, a physician by training, who for many years has been committed to social medicine and to issues of justice, particularly in vulnerable and oppressed populations. FIAN is formally recognised by relevant UN agencies. For over 25 years its focus has been the realisation of the human right to adequate and nourishing food. FIAN monitors and amplifies progress, and is committed to civil society engagement, community empowerment, and when necessary denunciation, which may include legal process, of official or corporate violations of human rights, including those that jeopardise social autonomy and food and nutrition security.

Geoffrey Cannon writes: Flavio Valente is one of the leaders in Brazil who suffered politically and personally during the military regime between the mid-1960s and mid-1980s. The best among them, of whom he is one, have dedicated their work and their lives to ensuring that the Constitution of 1988 is upheld, so that Brazil becomes and remains irreversibly a participatory democracy. My first meeting with Flavio was in Brasília in 2000 when, luxuriantly moustachioed, he was convenor of ABRANDH, the national civil society movement dedicated to upholding human rights.

That same year we met at the World Bank in Washington DC, Flavio having been elected convenor of the civil society section of the UN System Standing Committee on Nutrition. He gave an inspiring presentation on the SCN as a forum for UN agencies, bilaterals, academics, and public interest organisations. Later in the decade he was one of the masterminds of a memorable week-long SCN meeting in Brasília, as agreed with the office of Brazil's charismatic president, Luis Inácio (Lula) da Silva. The painful story of the displacement of public interest influence by corporate powers within the UN, underscores the need to maintain support for far-sighted leaders that still stand for genuine democratic process and citizen's rights.

Now clean shaven, Flavio is based in Heidelberg, Germany, as secretary-general of the impressive, dedicated and effective public interest organisation FIAN International. Why, is indicated by the story that follows.

Big Food Watchers
Confronting the land grabbers



Ingaberi Betty of Mubende district, Uganda, speaking to the 'Coffee to Go' film-makers. She states that her mother and father died as a result of the forced evictions

After a lawsuit that has lasted eleven years, a milestone judgment was issued for the evicted communities of the Kaweri-Plantation in Uganda. On 28 March 2013, the High Court in Kampala, Uganda, ordered compensation in the amount of approximately 11million Euros to be paid to the over 2,000 people who had been thrown off their land, now occupied by the Kaweri Coffee Plantation.

In August 2001, the government of Uganda authorised the eviction of communities in Mubende district from their land, which was then given to the German coffee company Neumann KaffeeGruppe, under its local subsidiary, to establish the first large-scale coffee plantation in Uganda. *FIAN has issued a fact-sheet on the case.*

The affected communities have described the eviction process, including in the film *'Coffee to Go' made for German television.* They were forced by soldiers from the Ugandan army at gunpoint to leave their villages. Some of them were beaten. Five people died because of the eviction. Buildings were burnt and demolished, including homes, six churches and a private clinic containing equipment. Property was looted and crops were destroyed. Today, the building that previously housed Kitemba´s primary school is used as the headquarters of the Kaweri Coffee Plantation.

Following the eviction the displaced communities suffered an increase of illnesses and deaths. This can largely be attributed to the loss of shelter, access to clean water and health care. Many have been living in makeshift shacks bordering the plantation. In order to sustain their livelihoods some have found temporary shelter on neighbouring land where they practice interim, small scale farming. However, the small plots are insufficient to provide enough food for the whole year.



Shacks built by the displaced people of Mubende, whose houses, farms, gardens and possessions were destroyed and their social coherence and settled ways of life were destroyed in eviction from their land

In 2002, after having failed to obtain the support of the Ugandan government, the community decided to bring the case to the Uganda High Court, against the General Attorney and Kaweri Coffee Plantation. The judgment, after delays by the defenders, was issued on 28 March 2013. The long-awaited judgment raised high hopes, but was also questionable. It absolves the Ugandan Government of responsibility for the eviction; and demands compensation not directly from the defendants – the Kaweri Coffee Plantation, but from their lawyers, who have not been accused!

In his final remarks, however, the judge clearly condemns the irresponsible acts of Kaweri Coffee Plantation: 'The German investors had a duty to ensure that our indigenous people were not exploited. They should have respected the human rights and values of people and as honourable businessman and investors they should have not moved into the lands unless they had satisfied themselves that the tenants were properly compensated, relocated and adequate notice was given to them', the judgment states. Kaweri Coffee Plantation has appealed against the judgment.

In June 2013, twelve years after the eviction, dispute over land in Uganda was the topic of an exchange between FIAN Germany, and Germany's former Minister for Economic Cooperation and Development Dirk Niebel, who asked FIAN to cease campaigning against the Neumann company. He says nothing about the court's judgment, but insists that FIAN is harming the reputation of the company and the whole Ugandan coffee industry. FIAN has replied saying there is no campaign against the company, but instead, continuous documentation of a case of human rights violations. This included international awareness-raising on the case, in order to gain some protection for people who are fighting for their rights. FIAN has proposed a meeting with Dirk Niebel to improve his apparently one-sided information, and stated that it will continue to support the evicted communities of Mubende until they are justly treated and their demands properly addressed.

Box 1

Land grabbing

The Mubende story is an example of the exploitation of vulnerable countries especially in Africa, often seen as a form of corporate imperialism, which takes the form of 'land-grabbing'. Oxfam explains, in its October 2013 report Sugar Rush.

Since 2000, nearly 800 large-scale land deals covering 33 million hectares globally, four times the size of Portugal, have been recorded. This land has shifted from smallholder production, local community use, or provision of ecosystem services, to commercial use.

Governments, businesses, and financial investors must respect and uphold the rights of communities and seek their informed consent before engaging in any land-related activities. While food and drink companies are not usually direct land holders, they are collectively major buyers of commodities grown on large plantations, often in countries plagued by land rights violations. Food and drink companies must urgently recognise these issues, and take steps to ensure that land rights violations and conflicts are not part of their supply chains.

In 2013, Oxfam launched *Behind the Brands*, part of its GROW campaign GROW calls on governments and companies to build a better food system: one that sustainably feeds a growing population and empowers poor people to earn a living, feed their families, and thrive. *Behind the Brands* tracks ten of the world"s biggest food and drink corporations and assesses their policies in helping to create this system. These 'Big 10' are Associated British Foods, Coca-Cola, Danone, General Mills, Kellogg, Mars, Mondelez International, Nestlé, PepsiCo, and Unilever. Collectively, they generate revenues of over $US 1.1 billion a day.

Large-scale land acquisitions become land grabs when they do any of the following:
1. Violate human rights, particularly those of women. 2. Flout the principle of free, prior, and informed consent. 3. Disregard a thorough assessment of social, economic, and environmental impacts. 4. Avoid transparent contracts with clear and binding commitments on employment and benefit sharing. 5. Eschew democratic planning, independent oversight, and meaningful participation. *(By all these criteria, the events in Mubende were a land-grab and also evidently illegal – though the court's judgement is under appeal).*

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*Valente F. Big Food Watchers. Confronting the land grabbers [Update]. World Nutrition April 2014, **5**, 4, 326-329*

How to respond

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