WN *Feedback*

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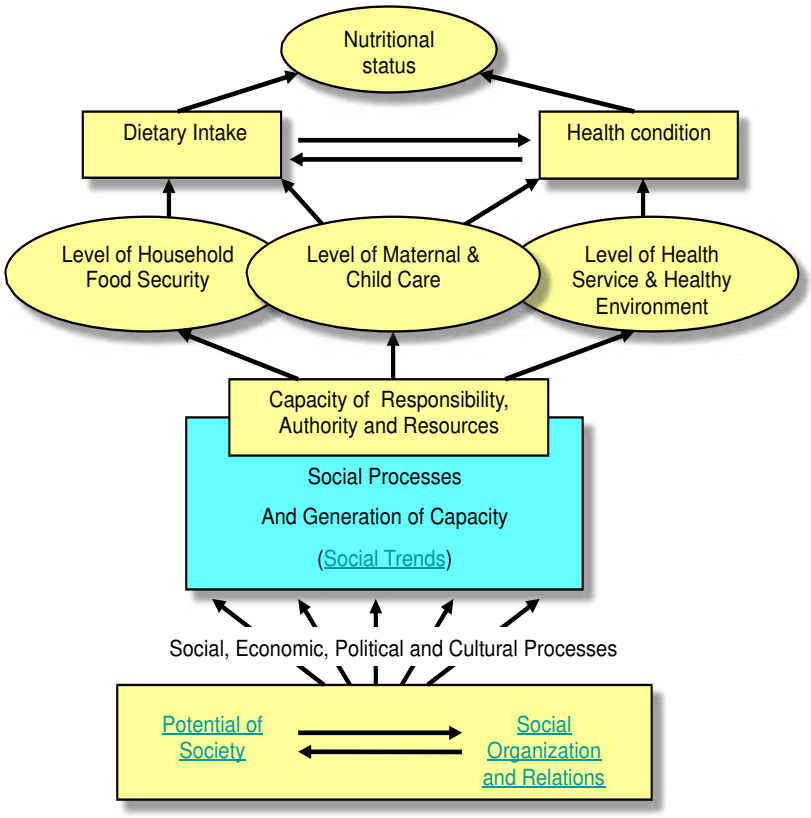
Causation
Causes of states of nutrition

Access March 2014 Editorial on the meaning of 'kwashiorkor' here
Access March 2014 Update on the Oslo-Lancet Commission here



From Urban Jonsson:

It was good to read the *Editorial* and the *Update* on the Lancet-Oslo Commission on the political determinants of inequity, in the March 2014 issue of *WN*. Both of these make reference to the conceptual framework in which immediate, underlying and basic causes of states of nutrition are identified. These are shown in the diagram above, for which I had responsibility when I was working within the United Nations

system. While the framework does indeed apply to all types of states of nutrition, it was originally applied to child malnutrition.

The first time I published the conceptual framework was in the *Food and Nutrition Bulletin* in 1981 (1), when I was working with Nevin Scrimshaw in the World Hunger Programme, then based at the United Nations University in Tokyo. Ten years later this framework was used in the formulation of the *Strategy for Improved Nutrition of Children and Women in Developing Countries*, adopted by the UNICEF Board in May 1990, the year when I joined UNICEF in New York as its chief of nutrition (2). Over the years most UN, bilateral and non-governmental agencies working in the field of nutrition have adopted the framework. It has been elaborated but has not changed very much.

Immediate, underlying, basic

The key feature of the framework is that the causes of malnutrition are arranged in a hierarchy that demonstrates the relationships among causes at the immediate, underlying and basic (structural) levels. The framework can be expressed in negative, positive, or neutral terms. The one above is the neutral version.

In negative terms, child malnutrition is the outcome; inadequate dietary intake and disease are the immediate causes; inadequate food, inadequate care, and inadequate basic health services are the underlying causes. The basic causes are generated by the historical, social, economic and cultural processes in society, ultimately driven by the dialectics between the potential of society and the social organisation and relations of production. Poverty and gender inequality are two of the most common basic causes.

Misconceptions

While most agencies operating in the area of nutrition have adopted this conceptual framework, not all have used it correctly. There are a number of misconceptions, of which the three most common and serious are the following:

- The fact that household food security ('food'), access to basic health services ('health'), and adequate maternal and child care ('care') are necessary conditions of good nutrition, but that each of them or any two together are not sufficient conditions for good nutrition, is often not understood and appreciated in planning. Sufficiency requires that each of the food, health and care conditions have been satisfied at the same time.

- Some agencies tend to leave out any recognition of the basic causes. The most common reason is a deliberate avoidance of political aspects of malnutrition. The World Bank, for example, is often avoiding any strong recognition of the basic causes. The Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) initiative has gone even further by simply defining two type of causes, 'nutrition effective causes' for the immediate causes

and 'nutrition sensitive' for the underlying causes, avoiding any serious discussion of the basic (structural) or 'root causes'.

- There is confusion in the understanding of the difference between causality and correlation. Many seem to believe that for example, risk-factor epidemiology identifies 'causes'. This is not correct. Determinants, often mixed up with causes, derived from such statistical methods, may or may not represent a cause. This mix-up had some serious consequences in the analysis of the causes of HIV infection.

A similar confusion has plagued the UN Food and Agriculture Organization for the last 30 years, in its insistence on using the term 'food and nutrition planning'. This is not a correct term. The proper term should be a phrase such as 'nutrition planning, with a particular focus on food'

The *WN* Editorial's recommendation to broaden the meaning of 'nutrition', to include issues like 'clinical nutrition', 'public health nutrition', and so on, is a most welcome proposal. This clearly reflects the structure and content of the conceptual framework.

In developing and then working with the conceptual framework now for approaching 40 years, I have found many advantages with its use. The most important one is that in practical work, there cannot be any agreement on priority actions for solving a problem until there is a reasonable agreement on the causes of the problem. The conceptual framework helps to 'ask the right question'. Albert Einstein once stated: 'In science, the most important thing is to ask the right questions. The answers can be found by amateurs'.

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Cicely Williams
What she was like at home

Access March 2014 Inspiration Geoffrey Cannon on Cicely Williams here

From Claudio Schuftan:

I am so pleased that *WN* (*in the March Inspiration*) has chosen Cicely Williams as public health and nutrition hero perhaps of all time, adding many new insights into her life and legacy. As I mentioned a couple of years ago in the regular column I wrote then, I was privileged to meet her in person, not only professionally but also intimately, in my home with my family.

She was a visiting professor at the Tulane School of Public Health in New Orleans where I taught in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Jim Carter, my boss, who was the School of Public Health head of nutrition, invited her once a year to lecture. Her formal link with Tulane had been made by Grace Goldsmith, the former Dean, who had been Cicely's classmate in the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine in the late 1920s, and a lifelong friend.

After she died, Jim – who to my great sadness died in February this year – continued the arrangement for Cicely to come to New Orleans and Tulane, to lecture to students. This is how I met her for three successive years, always with dinner at my home. Naomi Baumslag from South African also visited Tulane regularly. She was a close friend and admirer of Cicely, and her collaborator and biographer.

In her super-entertaining lectures Cicely always emphasised the importance of the mother-child dyad, and she had a fabulous set of slides of her Second World War years interned in a Japanese prison camp in Singapore. She always told us the kwashiorkor story, and how at first nobody believed her that it was a nutritional and poverty condition and not some exotic infectious or parasitic disease.

Privately she was like a gentle grandmother to my wife Aviva and me and she always played with our son Aron before dinner. He was amused by her 'cut glass' highly educated English accent. What a great conversationalist she was. She never missed a chance to tell me that her 'gospel' must be carried on into the future. I often think about this and of her, and I trust that *WN* continues in her spirit.

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Schuftan C. Cicely Williams. What she was like at home [Feedback]. World Nutrition April 2014, ***5,*** *4, 389*

Pablo Neruda

What's left of poetry now in Chile

Access February 2013 Geoffrey Cannon column on poetry and nourishment here
Access this issue Geoffrey Cannon on Pablo Neruda here



We remember the Portoviejo restaurant by the docks of Valparaiso where we ate scallops fresh from the ocean and drank local white wine, but now much of traditional Chilean food has been displaced

Marcela Reyes writes:

I was asked to check the *WN* *celebration of Pablo Neruda* our national poet here in Chile, which I have done. I am happy to join Geoffrey Cannon's memories of the meal that he and I had together in a workers' restaurant near the docks in Valparaiso in October 2011. The scallops and wine (right, above) are not those we ate, but the Portoviejo (left, above) is where we ate. Now I reflect on Geoffrey's theory that 'you can judge the quality of the food of any country by the quality of poetry about food written in that country'. In which case, Chilean food would seem to rate very high. But something is missing from the theory. It should end by saying 'at that time'. For Pablo Neruda died 40 years ago. A lot has happened in my country since then.

Neftali Reyes, Neruda's original name, was born in 1904 in Parral, a town in the south of Chile. His family did not have much money, and he was foodless for long periods during his first years as a teenager in Santiago, which may explain in part his passion for food. At that time traditional cuisine was all there was. Either you cooked (or someone cooked for you), or you did not eat. A cookbook of that time, Mariana Bravo's *La Cocina Popular Chilena*, is full of advice on how to get the most of the minimum: how to use every segment of food items, tricks for saving energy while cooking, information on which part of the soup includes more nutrients, wise ways to mix food items for improving nutrition, how to choose the best quality and cheapest food items, how to recycle what you have not eaten, and so on.

So, imagine that when Pinochet and his junta seized power in 1973, Neruda was not an old man dying, but was a young boy starting his life. At first it is likely that our young Neftali would have been as hungry as he was in his time. However, the 'neo-liberal' laboratory that Chile became in the 1980s and 1990s would have created a very different environment for him if he was in his 40s now.

Chilean food supplies are now saturated with ultra-processed products, which as in the US and UK and Mexico are now around 60 per cent of dietary energy. Even with the huge diversity from south to north, dietary patterns have become homogenised, at least in cities and most towns. No breakfast. Lunch (if any) at work or school, made from ready-to-consume products. 'Onces', a Chilean afternoon or night meal, is bread plus spreads. Virtually no cooking. Eating in fast food restaurants is 'the best' that a child can have. Several snacks and sodas are consumed every day. So 70 per cent of adults are overweight or obese, as are 50 per cent of first grade children.

I fear that a young Pablo Neruda now making his way in this world would be hired by a food product corporation or a public relations company to write odes not to conger chowder, but to burgers and sodas. He was great because of his times, and these are gone. This thought makes me sad. Now we must recreate Chilean food culture, so that great poetry will be written again. This thought inspires me.

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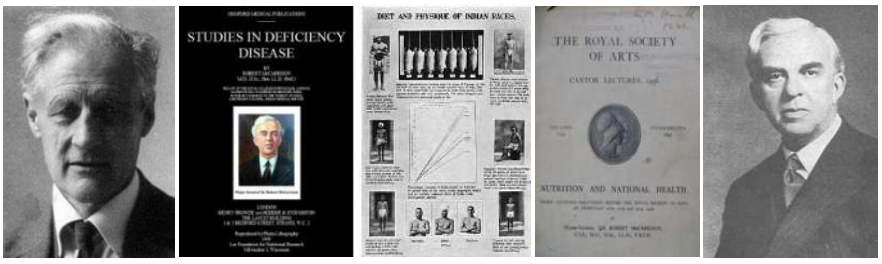
*Reyes M. Pablo Neruda. What's left of poetry now in Chile [Feedback]. World Nutrition April 2014, **5,** 4, 390-391*

McCarrison Society
The gospel of whole earth, whole food

Access March 2014 Geoffrey Cannon on Walter Yellowlees here
Access McCarrison Society newsletter here



Walter Yellowlees (left), founder, McCarrison Society in Scotland. Some of Robert McCarrison's books, investigations and lectures are shown in the middle pictures, with McCarrison himself (right)

From Cedric de Voil of the McCarrison Society:

Many thanks for the *Inspiration piece in WN* that has celebrated Walter Yellowlees. I write as chair of the Scottish group of the McCarrison Society and as such, successor to our founder Walter. As your piece says, Walter is a great advertisement for healthy diets and ways of life. He is indeed 97 years of age this month, April. Here with

your permission follows an advertisement for the the *McCarrison Scottish group* We hold two public meetings a year. We publish a newsletter twice a year, edited by Elizabeth Gay and designed by Neville Gay her husband. It is a good read. Our general purpose is to promote good health by advocating sound nutrition and in particular 'the unsophisticated foods of nature', as Robert McCarrison put it.

We have always believed that fresh foods of animal origin such as meat, milk, eggs, cheese and butter, which contain saturated fat, are not a cause of chronic diseases, as is still the generally accepted view. This is wrong, and it is good to see now that the real dietary villains, which include degraded bread, sugar, and highly processed food and drink products generally, are now being once again recognised as such.

While founded by medical professionals, such as Walter who is a retired physician – as am I – our public meetings are designed to attract both professionals, and people who want to keep themselves healthy through wholesome eating.

Our recent meetings have included presentations on 'The good Scots diet – what happened to it?', based on the book by Maisie Steven, one of our founder members; 'Growing the future', a Soil Association community assisted project in Dunkeld, Perthshire; 'Vitamin D – does Scotland need supplementation?'. Our next meeting, on 21 June in Edinburgh, relates to the possibility of Scotland becoming an independent nation, and is titled 'How might the referendum affect food and health in Scotland?' We are asking people in public health, farmers and growers, and food writers, to give their views.

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*De Voil C. McCarrison Society. The gospel of whole earth, whole food [Feedback]. World Nutrition April 2014, **5,** 4, 391-392*

Geoffrey Cannon adds:

Two interests I should declare: first as a friend of Michael Crawford, chair for 25 years of the McCarrison Society based in London, and second as a Society committee member for some years in the 1980s, and in 1988-1990 its publications secretary. My goodness, 25 years ago! These interests incline me to be nice about the Society, but I hope this does not make them competitive or conflicting. Readers can judge.

The period when I was active in the Society was, as now, one of ferment. We published three booklets, one by Kenneth Heaton on TL Cleave, one by Denis Burkitt on Hugh Trowell, and one compiled by Mary Gale and Brian Lloyd on Hugh Sinclair (1-3). These are all still available from the McCarrison Society, as shown in

the references below. A purpose of these labours of love was to commemorate great natural philosophers of nutrition, who with the partial exception of Hugh Trowell were then as now (or until recently) seen by the nutrition science establishment as 'outliers' – eccentric and largely irrelevant. 'Not real scientists' has been one sniffy phrase of dismissal. Another purpose was to bring into the Society as members and contributors, distinguished and influential scholars whose views were sympathetic with those of Robert McCarrison, such as Ken Heaton and Denis Burkitt.

Three 1989 newsletters, now collectors' pieces, published from Wholefoods at 24 Paddington Street, included short items, and also advertised Society conferences. Contributors included Francis Avery Jones, Arthur Wynn, Hugh Trowell, Richard Longhurst, Mary Gale, Denis Burkitt, Mary Langman, Derek Cooper, Ronald Finn, Rosemary Fitzpatrick, and others. Me, too. The Society made links with like-minded groups like the Soil Association and the Guild of Food Writers. Regional groups were formed. The January-March 1989 newsletter announced a new member of the committee – Cedric de Voil, now completing his silver jubilee.

A schism of wholefooders

Walter Yellowlees smote me with brimstone and fire for items I allowed into the newsletter suggesting that processed polyunsaturated oils were preferable to farm-fresh butter. Indeed, I seem to remember that he banned the newsletter north of the Border, proposed that my membership be revoked, and that I be cast into outer darkness. It felt like he had caught me scribbling graffiti on his tablet of stone.

This created difficulties, because London chairman Michael Crawford, who had just taken over from Andrew Strigner of Harley Street, toed the consensus line on saturated fats and coronary heart disease, as he still does, as far as I know, but Walter's lightning bolts were hurled at me. My take at the time was that Walter was out of date; but I was wrong, and I repent me. In the Old Testament, sinners who say sorry still get smitten with great smites, as I recall. Well, there it is. Hopefully not from generation to generation, please: there is no margarine eaten in my household. Our 9 year-old Gabriel has never touched the stuff except at school and parties. After this period I became a renegade from McCarrison, and instead focused on what was then the National Food Alliance, which is now Sustain (the Alliance for Better Food and Farming) of which I was chair throughout the 1990s.

Rifts are endemic in any organisation that does not do business with government officials or industrialists. As a collective noun, I suggest 'a schism of wholefooders'. Take raw milk, for example. Or don't take it. No no, I should not remind myself…

This is a shame, because the overall philosophy and principles that guide and inform the work of Robert McCarrison himself, and other giants like John Boyd Orr, Hugh Trowell, Hugh Sinclair, and among the living, Michael Crawford, are much the same, and it is this unity that always should be emphasised. Curiously, a great deal of what

they believed and espoused is contained in the works of the most popular writer on agriculture, food, health and well-being today, Michael Pollan, although as far as I know Michael would not see himself as a scholar of dietetic and nutrition science. He is coming to see the group at the University of São Paulo of which I am a member this winter, by which I mean northern hemisphere summer, and I will ask him.

Robert McCarrison, who he?

Readers who have got this far (thank you!) may be wondering about Robert McCarrison; like, who is he? *His wikipedia entry* is substantial and accurate, with a good bibliography, though it omits reference to his studies of different ethnic races in India, and mentions his 1936 Royal Society of Arts Cantor Lectures only briefly.

His dates are 1878-1960. He entered the Indian Colonial Service in 1901, and founded the Nutrition Research Laboratories in Coonoor on the uplands of the Nilgiris in Tamil Nadu, eventually becoming its director, retiring in 1935. The Coonoor facilities were moved to Hyderabad in 1958 and became the Indian National Institute of Nutrition in 1969 (4). In 2003 I went on a pilgrimage to Coonoor, but there is no trace now of the laboratories or of his having worked there.

Early in his career he became an authority on deficiency diseases, including beri-beri, and goitre, on which he was then the world authority (see the book cover at left, above Cedric de Voil's letter). With experience he became bolder, and developed his general theory. After conducting a series of animal and human experiments and observations, he concluded that monotonous diets based on industrially processed foods, notably steel-milled white rice, as with Madrassis, bred scrawny weak people vulnerable to many infectious and chronic diseases. Whereas study of Pathans showed that varied diets with lots of vegetables and fruits, wholegrains, legumes (pulses), and whole milk and eggs, bred strong resilient people resistant to any form of disease (see the illustration above) (4). Britain depended on India for fighting men. A total of 2.5 million soldiers from the Indian sub-continent were to fight on the British side in the 1939-1945 war. So this information was extremely valuable.

After retirement from service in India, he propagated these ideas in Britain, adapting them to British conditions. He condemned sugar and sugared products. He pointed out that meat, while desirable, was expensive and not necessary. And he encapsulated his philosophy in his series of Cantor lectures at the Royal Society of Arts in 1936, reprinted by the McCarrison Society in 1982 as an informal bible for members and supporters (5). The original RSA publication is also shown above.

Most of his evangelism in the 1930s was much the same as that preached by John Boyd Orr, Jack Drummond and others, but they, not he, became leaders of the British wartime food and nutrition policy that kept the nation going, probably because he was seen as a colonial service type who knew more about Indian peasants than British workers.

Reasons for ignorance

Robert McCarrison (who was knighted for his service in India) is now almost totally unknown, except to scholars and enthusiasts. This is a mistake. His general theory of whole earth, whole food, and good health and well-being, needs to be revived and renewed now. But first, three errors need to be corrected.

Dead and buried

A basic error is that in nutrition, unlike sciences such as say physics, anybody who is dead is usually forgotten. The exceptions, like Denis Burkitt because of dietary fibre, and John Boyd Orr because of the UK home front wartime food policy, prove the rule. If say 20 nutrition professionals at any level from student to professor were asked to name say seven important nutrition scientists (or in the previous language, dietetic scientists or natural philosophers concerned with nutrition) born in any century up to and including the 19th, I doubt that five could do so. But in the grand phrase, we are standing on giants' shoulders, and one giant is Robert McCarrison.

More and more about less and less

A second error is aversion to general theories. Robert McCarrison discerned nutrition as a cause of the rise and fall of societies and civilisations. He saw that industrially processed diets are the efficient cause of diseases of most systems of the body. But in conventional modern clinical nutrition, unlike sciences such as say zoology, the established method has been to know more and more about less and less. This 'focus' is in fact short-sighted, and can be dangerous.

An example of pernicious specialism is the finding, turned into recommendations in international dietary guidelines reports, that almost everybody should eat lots more fish, as the embodiments of certain fatty acids in short supply. But what about the fact that the world's ocean fish stock is dwindling, some say irreversibly? The conventional answer until fairly recently has in effect been 'that's off my topic'. This is a bit similar to the response of the men who built the atom bombs who, when asked if they had thought about what would happen when the bombs were dropped, said 'we leave that to the politicians'. True, the point about fish has now got across. Let us hope it is now not too late.

Some precisely focused work is crucial – McCarrison's own work on goitre and iodine being an example. But discernment of types of dietary pattern as 'master' causes of general states of disease and health has been dismissed, almost as if ravings. Happily, this is now changing. The case for breastfeeding is now accepted as holistic. Conventional journals are now acknowledging the multi-organ metabolic syndrome, in effect a 'master' disease. It will be good to acknowledge Robert McCarrison as a pioneer, and indeed to learn now from what he wrote then.

The name of the game – processing

A third and related error is to misunderstand or underestimate the main purpose and meaning of nutrition. Giants like Robert McCarrison are now neglected in part because they stood for dietary patterns that make sense in evolutionary, historical and cultural terms – that enhance society and civilisation. They were hostile to intensive and aggressive methods of agriculture and manufacture simply because they couls see that these were unnatural, destructive and dangerous.

But nutrition, unlike sciences such as say palaeontology, has come to serve the short-term interests of current governments and industries. Big ideas are bad for big business. As from the time of the industrial revolution, and increasingly during and after the Second World War, this has been all about going for growth. Government and industry continue to combine in a concerted and colossal drive, with support from science and technology, to generate more production, more goods, more money, more people, and more methods of agriculture and manufacture that have become more intensive, more rapacious, and as we all know now, more pathogenic.

Thirty years ago I had a conversation with an eminent scientist, then president of a London-based Royal national medical society, when preparing a series of features in *The Times*, and I asked him to make a statement about food processing. 'In my opinion' he said 'if something is advertised, there must be something wrong with it'. He asked me not to quote him. 'I am about to retire' he said (in his Western Isles Scots accent). 'Come and see me afterwards'. Stupidly, I never did, and then he died.

And the moral…

What is the moral of these stories?' One is to keep the flame alight, as Cedric de Voil is doing, on behalf of colleagues and the people of Scotland. Two is to see that epidemic diseases are indeed symptoms of sick societies, and to speak out without fear or favour, as Walter Yellowlees has done. Three is to believe that the tide will turn, and that nutrition will again become the science of nourishment, as was the natural philosophy of dietetics. People who now see the light as Robert McCarrison did around a century ago, may then become the new counsellors of new enlightened leaders, before much of the planet is a desert or a cinder.

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Cannon G. Robert McCarrison. The gospel of whole earth, whole food [Feedback]. World Nutrition April 2014, ***5,*** *4, 392-397*



Action on Sugar: Situation report

Over the top, into the sound of applause

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

From Katharine Jenner of Action on Sugar:



Action on Sugar founders (top, row): Graham MacGregor (chair), Katharine Jenner (campaigns director), Aseem Malhotra (science director),); Aubrey Sheiham, Philip James, Mike Rayner. (Next): Tim Lang, Andrew Rugg-Gunn, Nicholas Wald, Jack Cusick, John Wass, Peter Sever. (Then): David Haslam, Tam Fry, Neville Rigby; Robert Lustig, Yoni Freedhoff, Simon Capewell

I write as campaigns director of *Action on Sugar* to report progress since *the launch of AoS in London* a couple of months ago. AoS chair Graham MacGregor (top left) and I planned this action group as a response to being bystanders on the worldwide obesity battles as representatives of Consensus Action on Salt and Health (CASH).

Our action group on salt is seeing real and effective progress (1).We couldn't understand why similar action wasn't being taken on dietary energy intake.

The reason to reduce sugar

Everybody knows that consuming more dietary energy than the body needs, causes overweight and obesity. So it seemed logical and sensible to start a campaign to reduce calorie intake slowly and gradually without removing essential nutrients from the diet. Based on our successful approach of slow and gradual removal of salt from products, we modelled the effects of reducing saturated and *trans* fats, sugars and other carbohydrates. The answer was clear. The amount of added sugars in food products and thus in diets could readily be reduced by 100 calories – roughly 5 per cent of total energy intake – without risk.

Galvanised by Aseem Malhotra and his passionate call to review dietary advice on sugar (2), we discussed this approach with our colleagues from CASH and from the obesity world. They agreed it was a sensible and pragmatic approach, but warned us to tread with caution. We invited many experts to join us. Not all accepted for various reasons, including unwillingness to be put in the line of fire from Big Food. The substantial group that accepted (see the line-up in the picture above) became our advisors for the launch (3).

The response has been phenomenal. We were prepared to be ridiculed and vilified. We were not prepared for the outpouring of support from the public, the doors being opened to us from the Department of Health and the Secretary of State for Health. Nor did we expect what has been almost silence from the food product manufacturers whose products depend on sugar, other than weak statements from the Food and Drink Federation that represents Big Food in the UK (4)

We have of course been criticised. The 'libertarian' section of the public are inclined to put everything for public health good (including smoking cessation and immunisation, but apparently not sanitation and safe water) under the 'nanny state' banner. We think it is the food manufacturers who are doing the 'nannying', telling us that we must either eat heavily sugared, salty, fatty foods, or live a 'puritan' life. But there is a better option: to improve the nutritional profile of processed products.

Some health professionals have criticised us, wondering where our advisors are coming from, noting their disparate views, and commenting on the fact that they are all male and almost all from the UK. But in reality there are not different factions in Action on Sugar. We all have the same end goal of benefitting the public. Being defensive takes time that is better spent working together.

All our advisors agree that sugar is an unnecessary source of dietary energy and that the amount in food supplies and thus diets should be reduced. Action on Sugar is also an open group. Our advisors are free to express their own views, in their own

ways, which are of course not all identical. It is only our media releases that are official, approved by our chair Graham MacGregor. Also, many of our UK-based advisors operate internationally. We are now reviewing our structure to be more inclusive and will greatly welcome enquiries from potential new members – scientific, medical, lay. Our next full list will include female colleagues and also experts based outside the UK.

Perhaps Action on Sugar has let a genie out of the bottle. Much media coverage was sensational, but it has captured the attention of the public and of UK policy-makers, in our good cause. We are now planning a considered and rational programme of work, before once again heading above the parapet and going over the top.

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Jenner K. Action on Sugar. Situation report. Over the top, into the sound of applause [Feedback]. World Nutrition April 2014, ***5,*** *4, 397-399*

How to respond

Feedback is edited by Isabela Sattamini. Please address letters for publication to wn.letters@gmail.com. Letters usually respond to or comment on contributions to *World Nutrition*. More general letters will also be considered. Usual length for main text of letters is between 350 and 1,000 words but they can be shorter or longer. Any references should usually be limited to up to 12. Letters are edited for length and style, may be shortened or developed, and once edited are sent to the author for approval.