WN *Feedback*

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Editor's note

We begin our *Feedback* section this month with two letters whose authors collectively have vast experience of infant and young child nutrition. Both letters make strong statements concerning conflicts of interest, and the role of transnational 'Big Food' and 'Big Snack' corporations and their supporters in what have become known as 'public-private partnerships'. We invite responses from correspondents with different views.

Conflicts of interest. Maternal and child nutrition
Big Food and Big Science



Access June-July 2013 Update on Big Food in Africa here
Access June 2013 open letter from Indian paediatricians here
Access August 2013 Governance Now report here
Access August-September 2013 The issue here

From Arun Gupta, Patti Rundall, Urban Jonsson

We begin this letter with an extract from the opening address of WHO director-general Margaret Chan, made recently at the 8th Global Conference on Health Promotion in Helsinki. She said (1):

> It is not just Big Tobacco anymore. Public health must also contend with Big Food, Big Soda, and Big Alcohol. All of these industries fear regulation, and protect themselves by using the same tactics… These… include front groups, lobbies, promises of self-regulation, lawsuits, and industry-funded research, that confuse the evidence and keep the public in doubt…. This is formidable opposition. Market power readily translates into

> political power. Few governments prioritize health over big business. As we learned from experience with the tobacco industry, a powerful corporation can sell the public just about anything.

Big Food and Big Snack – the giant transnational corporations whose profits depend on unhealthy ultra-processed products (2) – are now deeply penetrating the 'emerging markets' of Asia and Africa (3-7). Our letter here is concerned with the equally deep penetration of the transnationals and their associated or supportive organisations, into the scientific community, into nutrition policy-making at the highest level, and into public health programmes that affect the health and lives of hundreds of millions of people.

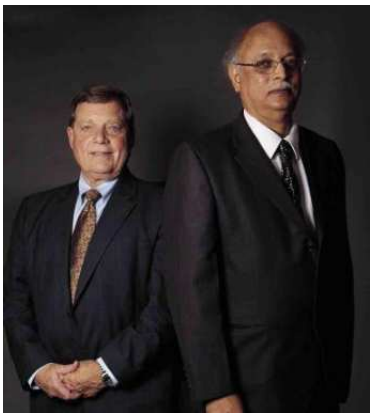
We see this largely as a consequence of the failure of elected governments to fulfil their first duty, which is to govern. We also feel that some policy-makers and many scientists, including those working at the highest level, underestimate or overlook the consequences of their own actions.

The influence of Big Food can be subtle, and may, in the opinion of reasonable people, be seen to affect the judgement of public policy agenda-setters who act in good faith and whose personal integrity is not at issue. We are not questioning the motives of any of the people mentioned in this letter. We are though, deeply concerned about the possible effects of their activities. We also feel that in their attitude to that part of industry whose profits come from products that are harmful to public health, too many scientists are being naïve, as implied by Margaret Chan's statement. We are specifically concerned with the very sensitive area of infant and young child nutrition, the field in which we have worked for many years.

Fair shared values

The Lancet published a series on *Maternal and Child Nutrition* in June this year (8). Convenor of the whole series and lead author of the paper on 'Maternal and child undernutrition and overweight in low-income and middle-income countries', Robert Black of the Johns Hopkins School of Public Health, a scholar of great distinction in the field of paediatric nutrition, and co-author Venkatesh Mannar, president of the Canada-based Micronutrient Initiative, declared in the journal in its 'conflict of interest' section that they are members of the 'Nestlé Creating Shared Value Advisory Committee'.

Oddly though, an account published in August in the Indian journal *Governance Now* said: 'Both authors have maintained they do not have any conflict of interest' (9). This may be a slip for which that journal is responsible, given their declaration in *The Lancet*. In our view, and that of a group of *leading Indian paediatrians* (10), there clearly is a conflict of interest, which we see as troublesome. The issue is not one of personal integrity. It is one of apparent sympathy with corporate policies and practices which are damaging to public health, most of all in the global South.



Robert Black, and B Sesikeran, formerly of the Indian National Institute of Nutrition, appear in Nestlé 2012 Creating Shared Value report, as seen here

At the series launch in London, *Lancet* editor-in-chief Richard Horton introduced Robert Black as in effect the most influential authority on child health in the world. He explained that the purpose of successive *Lancet* series is to bring together the best scientists, to do the best work, to have the greatest global impact.

It would seem that Robert Black is a supporter of partnerships with food product transnationals, including Nestlé, the world's biggest manufacturer of baby formula, judging by a condensed version of a feature he has co-authored in the *2012 Nestlé Creating Shared Value report* (11). This ends by saying: 'Food manufacturers can contribute in several ways: through targeted micronutrient fortification, in line with WHO and other science-based recommendations; by reducing the volumes of public health sensitive ingredients and increasing those such as fruits, whole grains and fibres in their products; and by educating consumers around issues such as balanced nutrition and the benefits of exercise'. The language is a bit coy (what are 'public health sensitive ingredients'?) and the syntax is a bit mangled, but we get the drift.

Strangely though, this final paragraph does not appear in the 'full' version of the feature, also on the Nestlé website. The ends by advocating 'concerted and co-ordinated actions by governments and civil society', and does not mention industry (12). The long sentence above does not appear. Given its non-appearance in the 'full' version, we wonder who drafted this additional statement, and wonder if Robert Black and his distinguished Indian co-author really do believe that transnational food product corporations are appropriate educators of the public on balanced nutrition.

We cannot see adequate justification for senior policy-makers with such influence in public health nutrition, also to be advisors to a transnational food product corporation, the biggest in the world, many of whose leading branded products are unhealthy, and which in common with other corporations continues to violate internationally agreed codes on breastmilk substitutes, baby food and baby feeding equipment. These violations are not history. They continue (13,14). Nor are they small matters. Bad practice in infant and young child nutrition is dangerous.

We appreciate that scientists and other health professionals may accept invitations to serve on corporate committees in order to have an influence in the interests of public health and the public good. (This we understand was why former WHO director-general Gro Harlem Brundtland became a member of the PepsiCo Blue Ribbon Advisory Board, and why Dean Ornish, advisor to previous US president Bill Clinton's waistline, is a consultant to the big bosses at Mars and McDonald's). Big Food and Snack advisors may be critical of corporate policies and practices, and may seek to change these. If so, we invite their responses. *[Ed – which WN will publish]*

GAIN and SUN

Within public health nutrition policy-making, actual or apparent conflicts of interest are not unusual. Thus, Marc Van Ameringen, executive director of the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition, based in Geneva, Switzerland, is a member of *The Lancet* series advisory committee, as is Derek Yach, until recently a senior vice-president at PepsiCo, which is now proposing to provide nursing mothers and children in Mexico with fortified formula feed. A prime purpose of GAIN, a big player in infant and young child nutrition, is to lobby the UN and its agencies, and governments, to 'open up' 'emerging markets' for its many corporate partners.

GAIN recently sought to position itself not as a public-private partnership but as a non-government organization, evidently in order to seek formal accreditation with WHO. However, in January this year the GAIN request was refused by the WHO Executive Board that represents member states, pending answers on 'the nature and extent of the Alliance's links with the global food industry, and the position of the Alliance with regard to its support and advocacy of WHO's nutrition policies, including infant feeding and marketing of complementary foods' (15).

The issue of conflicted interests, and alleged consequent biases in the *Lancet* series, shared by many health professionals and public interest organisations in India, resulted in vigorous public debate at the launch of the series in India. This has cast doubt on the validity of various recommendations made in the series, because of the apparent advantages to industry, and the lack of evidence of public benefit, if these were implemented (16,17).

In our view some of these doubts are well-founded. Thus, another paper in the June *Lancet* series suggests that the 'private sector' should be a partner in alleviation of malnutrition of all types, and calls for the 'Generation of evidence about the positive and negative effects of private sector and market-led approaches to nutrition' (18). We wonder if the authors have thought about how such collaboration would work. How could this possibly generate independent findings? We also wonder why almost all discussion that promotes partnerships with 'the private sector' (which in practice mostly means transnational food product manufacturers) does not discriminate between types of corporation, or within types, specific firms. Advocacy of collaborations with governments that made no distinction between the relative

capacity and integrity of the governments of (say) the Democratic Republic of the Congo and New Zealand, would not be taken seriously.

Big Food and Big Snack push for self-regulation and public-private partnerships as the way forward. But a paper in another *Lancet* series published in February this year concludes that such policies are not effective and not safe (6). Despite this, the *Lancet* as represented by Richard Horton, clearly supports 'the private sector' as part of the solution to malnutrition. This is mistaken. As Margaret Chan indicates, transnational and other food product corporations are a large part of the problem.

We now come to SUN, the UN- and US-backed Scaling up Nutrition initiative. This is commonly seen, including in the June *Lancet* series, as the way forward from what previously was characterised in an earlier *Lancet* series as a disorganised and dysfunctional number of ineffective and often warring entities. Certainly, SUN is businesslike. The colossal transnational fats and oils products corporation Unilever, and GAIN, and the Gates Foundation, are members of the main board of SUN, which promotes 'multi-stakeholder platforms' with 'business networks'. Now SUN's own Business Network has been set up to improve nutrition, co-chaired by the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition, and the UN World Food Programme.

Words and actions

Infant and young child feeding is a particularly sensitive area, for good reason. The International Code of Marketing Breastmilk Substitutes, and continual World Health Assembly Resolutions, call for the end of all inappropriate promotion of foods for infants and young children (19). Breastmilk substitute manufacturers and their front and associated organisations cannot claim to be making a positive contribution to public health while at the same time they flout the Code and oppose formal restrictions, even to the extent of recently claiming that these will contribute to undernutrition! (20). We are reminded of the public relations wizards who claimed on behalf of the automobile industry that seat-belts would increase deaths on the road, and on behalf of the arms industry that restrictions on hand-guns would increase rates of murder. It is also true that in most countries, formula and other baby product manufacturers can flout the International Code with impunity, for only 37 of 199 national governments have passed laws making the Code enforceable (21).

The WHO World Health Assembly continues to call for the application of rules, so that corporations and other conflicted parties do not have 'undue influence' over policymaking (22, 23). Much depends on what such warm phrases mean. Big Food and Big Snack depend for their profits on ultra-processed products that cause overweight and obesity, and leading lines of some of these corporations are baby food products that are a cause of malnutrition and especially in countries where water can be unsafe, increase the risk of dangerous and often deadly infections. Overweight and underweight are public health crises in part caused by the 'private sector', now often seen as an answer to the problem to which it has contributed.

Our invitation

The key messages of the February *Lancet* paper we have cited (6) are:

1 Transnational corporations are major drivers of non-communicable disease epidemics and profit from increased consumption of tobacco, alcohol, and ultra-processed food and drink (so-called unhealthy commodities).
2 Alcohol and ultra-processed food and drink industries use similar strategies to the tobacco industry to undermine effective public health policies and programmes.
3 Unhealthy commodity industries should have no role in the formation of national or international policy for non-communicable disease policy.
4 Despite the common reliance on industry self-regulation and public–private partnerships to improve public health, there is no evidence to support their effectiveness or safety.
5 In view of the present and predicted scale of non-communicable disease epidemics, the only evidence-based mechanisms that can prevent harm caused by unhealthy commodity industries are public regulation and market intervention.

We agree, and also with application to deficiency and infectious diseases. This is *The Lancet* position that *The Lancet* editor should adopt. So should contributors to *The Lancet*, and so should all opinion-formers and policy-makers in our field. We invite all scientists currently advising Big Food and Big Snack and associated organisations, to resign these positions, or to write open letters justifying their decision not to do so.

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Statements of interest. Arun Gupta states: I am Asian co-ordinator for the International Baby Food Action Network, as well as being a member of the Indian Prime Minister's National Nutrition Council. I declare an interest as co-signatory of the open letter cited above (10). Patti Rundall states: I am policy director of Baby Milk Action. Urban Jonsson states: I am a former chief of Nutrition, UNICEF, in New York, and former UNICEF regional director in East and South Africa and in South-East Asia. These positions give us a sustained interest in the topic of this letter, which is supportive of public health and the interests notably of women and children in the global South, whose 'emerging markets' are now being penetrated by Big Food and Big

Snack with the support of many of the most powerful policy-makers in UN and other international organisations, national governments, the specialist media, and Big Science.

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Conflicts of interest. Big Food and civil society organisations
Hot beds



So we opted for a Multi-Stakeholder Cross-Disciplinary Integrated approach.

Access March 2013 WN editorial on fortification and DSM here
Access June-July Update on G8 London nutrition summit here
Access 6 June Guardian/DSM discussion on industry and malnutrition here

From Ted Greiner, Seoul, South Korea

United Nations agencies working on nutrition, and national government departments engaged in food aid with counterparts in the global South, have for some time now

formed so-called 'public-private partnerships' (PPPs) with corporations in the food and nutrition product business (1).

But now, I believe mainly in response to pressure that might best be described as 'political', some of the most sophisticated, independent and critical non-government organisations (NGOs) are deep in bed with transnational and other big corporations. The specialists working in these NGOs are worried, clear on the problems arising from conflicts of interest, but have not been able to avoid this process, the new 'flavour of the month' in development assistance.

I suspect and hope that these NGOs are learning lessons that will lead them toward drawing as much of the positive as possible out of the experience, limiting the harm, being choosy about their partners, and perhaps indulging less in the future if the cost becomes too high for the benefits gained. Actually, from what I've understood, corporations are easy to woo when it comes to link-ups that get them good public relations, but play hard to get when it comes to accessing their wallets.

The International Baby Food Action Network (IBFAN) is an NGO renowned for avoiding links with corporations that might bring any hint of conflicts of interest. I suggest that the NGOs that are now gaining experience with PPPs, and those thinking of taking a PPP plunge, will benefit from having a detailed sit-down with IBFAN to explore issues and lessons learned so far.

The print and electronic media are into 'partnerships' too, though these are 'private-private'. Take the UK national daily *The Guardian*, lauded for its independence. In the May-June issue in your *Update* section, *WN* reported on the G8 'nutrition summit' held in London (2). Linked with this event, on 6 June *The Guardian* held a discussion on how industry can help combat malnutrition, sponsored by *DSM* (which stands for Dutch State Mines). DSM is a transnational corporation which is now the biggest manufacturer of synthetic vitamins and other bioactive substances in Europe and perhaps in the world (3).

More dalliance

The discussion (4) displayed hair-raising ignorance. For example, somebody attacked IBFAN for questioning *The Guardian's* decision to take DSM money to hold the event, asking if this meant that IBFAN policy was never to have any discussions with industry! Not the same thing! Worse, was participants in the discussion agreeing how wonderful it is that NGO people, and specialists like anthropologists, can help corporations understand native cultures and markets better, only minutes after it was – or so I thought – made clear that transnational and other corporations cause untold harm by displacing local rational and appropriate food systems, supplies and dietary patterns in favour of their ultra-processed products.

One participant in the discussion, I assume from DSM, said that the UN World Food Programme (WFP) gives DSM a great deal of help to get to know local conditions – a deal that is heavy on corporate benefit, and no doubt very cheap market research. There was not a lot of discussion from the point of view of the people suffering from hunger and malnutrition. It may be a lot to ask, but surely there should be room for an occasional reminder of the original excuse for involving transnational and other corporations with UN agencies and non-government organisations in the first place.

Later in the discussion, World Food Programme staff celebrated their great PPP with DSM, for rice fortification with vitamin A. This was a deal that involved DSM giving the WFP a million dollars to grease the wheels. I smiled wryly when reading this, recalling in 2007 when WFP refused to collaborate with PATH (the Program for Appropriate Technology in Health) when I worked there. This is a big Seattle-based non-profit organisation mainly supported by governments and foundations such as the Seattle-based Gates Foundation.

PATH had approached WFP about rice fortification, in line with WFP's 2005 policy document stating its foods should be fortified whenever possible. Now WFP is delighted to use the much more complex and expensive DSM rice fortification technology which uses a difficult to manufacture and to run hot extruder, while PATH's 'Ultra Rice' is made with a simple, low-cost cold extruder. DSM's technology gives a more beautiful product which may be important for paying customers, but hardly for those served by WFP.

DSM may feel like a particularly suitable corporate partner, in part because its products are not purchased by the public. So they do not need to promote their products with the demand-creating advertising that public health professionals often find provocative. Most of its vitamins and other bioactive products are sold to other industry buyers that manufacture fortified, 'functional' and other types of value-added products that often make health claims and are sold at premium prices. They also sell to development partners in the public sector and their promotion of fortification and supplementation makes them seem to be benefactors and as such, suitable partners.

DSM probably has a careful corporate culture. In 2002 the corporation purchased for €2.5 billion the vitamin business previously owned by Swiss-based corporation Hoffman-la Roche, after Roche had been fined $US 500 million in the US courts and € 452 million in the European courts, both then record fines, having pleaded guilty to illegal global price-fixing.

I suggest that non-government organisations, and the media – and readers of this journal – should be aware that vitamins, like food products, are very big business indeed.

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Statement of interest. In 1990-1995 I was chair of the UN Standing Committee on Nutrition bilateral constituency. From 2007 I have been chair of the UN SCN NGO/civil society constituency. No full SCN meetings have involved the bilateral or NGO/CSO constituencies since 2008. From 2004 to 2008 I was senior nutritionist at PATH and directed its Ultra Rice project during the latter years of that period.

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Public health and nutrition policy, action

The 'great man' fallacy

Access June 2013 Philip James on Boyd Orr here

From Tim Lang, London, UK



John Boyd Orr (above enrobed as chancellor of the University of Aberdeen) was a great reformer, for sure. Philip James's column in your June-July issue (1) is thoughtful, personal, and most importantly shows how our antecedents seized

moments. I thought it splendid. My only thought was that the account given was of Boyd Orr and his colleagues decidedly on the 'inside track'. Much of the space that 'something must be done' was created by immense pressure by outside track work, too. One of my heroes is Frederick le Gros Clarke (1892-1977). What he (who straddled the inside and outside) did, was phenomenal, and had lasting social benefit.

But outside were the trades unions, community activists, hunger campaigners, and all the many thousands of good folk who rebuilt the case for social justice throughout the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The danger is that history focuses on 'great men' (and women) rather than on the crucial and essential social movements that build the structures on which the greats can stand.

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Human height, weight, size
If, when and why it is best to be small

Access March 2011 Thomas Samaras on human size here
Access March 2013 column on human size here



Reasons to be small. From left to right: William Hogarth, Immanuel Kant, Charles (Charlie) Chaplin, Milton Friedman, Olga Korbut, and Lionel Messi

From Thomas Samaras, San Diego, USA

It was refreshing to read your excellent *WN* March column on human size (1). There are so many examples of short people who have excelled in so many fields that it is

hard to know where to start. The column gave examples. Here are more, above: from left, British painter William Hogarth, German philosopher Immanuel Kant, US economist Milton Friedman, and gymnast Olga Korbut, all of whom were about 5 foot or just over 1.50 metres in height, and therefore 'stunted', and movie star Charlie Chaplin and footballer Lionel Messi, who were or are around 5 foot 6 or about 1.67 metres in height (2).

There are many mortality studies showing taller people have lower death rates than shorter people. But only a few longevity studies show that taller people live longer. Perhaps it is assumed that mortality studies are longevity studies. However, mortality studies do not track a population's mortality over a lifetime. In economically developed countries, the top six highest life expectancy populations are shorter than the six tallest populations (3). In addition, most longevity studies show that shorter people live longer and are more likely to become centenarians (3,4).

Again, most studies show that shorter people have more cardiovascular disease. But such findings are likely to be confounded by many factors unrelated to height as such, examples being socio-economic status, catch-up growth, excess weight, and childhood illnesses that stunt growth (4). My own reviews on height and cardiovascular disease shows that shorter people have less disease than taller ones (4,5). Andrzej Bartke also recently presented the case for 'smaller is healthier' (6).

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Human height, weight, size
If, when and why it is best to be small

Access March 2011 WN Thomas Samaras on human size here
Access July 2010 column on human size here
Access November 2011 column on human size here
Access March 2013 column on human size here



Reasons to be small. From the left to right: Rene Dubos and John Waterlow; and then, Voltaire, Yuri Gagarin, Sachin Tendulkar, and Queen Elizabeth II

From Geoffrey Cannon, São Paulo, Brazil

Here is an apology, an addition and a correction (1). My apology is for inadequate\ attention to Thomas Samaras, who has for 40 years trawled the literature to demonstrate the overall comparative biological and other benefits for humans of being relatively small (2,3).

He does not address the issue of infants and young children in low-income countries, especially in India and Africa, who when very short or thin are much more likely to suffer repeated infections and other diseases, and so are at high risk of death. This is a gap in his thesis. Scientists who believe that short stature in parts of the world where food is scarce is a healthy adaptation (4,5) have been understandably attacked (6), despite evidence of adaptability to dietary energy availability (7). A reconciliation here, is that in all but severe cases 'stunting' and 'wasting' are 'warning signs': reliable markers of vulnerability, but not in themselves causal.

The biological evidence on cardiovascular disease and on lifespan in high-income countries, mostly favours being tall (8), but tallness is associated with increased incidence of some cancers (9). Accelerated growth and early puberty, perhaps why the risk of hormone-related cancers is increased, are not 'facts of nature'. These are in part a result of the paediatric policy of 'going for growth' which has involved feeding infants artificial formula or weaning them on to energy-dense products.

In his book and *WN* commentary (2,3), Thomas Samaras mentions that many distinguished people have been or are short. Some of these would fall into the 'stunted' category, such as (in the pictures introducing his letter) William Hogarth, Immanuel Kant, Milton Friedman and Olga Korbut, and (in the pictures introducing this letter) Voltaire and Queen Elizabeth II. In some cases, such as Olga Korbut and

Yuri Gagarin, success depended on being short; and a low centre of gravity favours some players in some sports, which may help explain the success of Sachin Tendulkar and Lionel Messi.

But this does not mean that it is better to be small from a biological point of view. My own belief that 'it is best to be small' derives primarily not so much from the biological evidence, as from the ecological, economic and environmental consequences of a tall and relatively heavy human race, bred on protein-dense and energy-dense diets to become the equivalent of gas-guzzling automobiles. In resolving current public health problems, bigger problems for future generations, and for the living and physical world, can be created.

My addition is this. In my column I quoted nutrition scientist John Waterlow's (second to left, above) concern about a big human race. Also, the idea that physically big populations are problematic was outlined half a century ago by the biologist and philosopher René Dubos (1901-1982, left above). Here is what he writes (10):

'One of the criteria of health most widely accepted at the present time [the late 1950s] is that children should grow as large and as fast as possible. But is size such a desirable attribute? Is the bigger child happier? Will he live longer? Does he perceive with greater acuity the loveliness or grandeur of the world? Will he contribute more to man's cultural heritage? Or does his larger size merely mean that he will need a larger motor-car, become a larger soldier, and in his turn beget still larger children?'

Dubos adds: 'The criteria of growth developed for the production of market pigs would hardly be adequate for animals feeding on acorns in the forests and fending for themselves as free individuals. Nor are they for man…The assumption that human beings should grow fast and large has never been examined closely… Its only certain merit is that weight, size and a few other physical traits can be measured readily… There is no evidence, however, that these criteria have much bearing on happiness [or] on the development of civilisation… Large size is likely to prove even less of an asset in the world of the future, and may even become a handicap'.

My correction, is a result of finding my papers on Hugh Trowell. I met Hugh in London at the Royal Society of Medicine in December 1985. His paper on pathological growth, based on an address to the Harvard department of nutrition around 1971, was eventually published in a small journal in 1975 (11). Citing the precipitate drop of menarche in industrial societies since the mid 19th century, he writes: 'The whole basis by which we are differentiated from the primates has been reversed… Everywhere all over the globe children are seen with a shortened period of rapid growth [and] an earlier menarche… The excessive growth and premature maturation of children is, in my opinion, an expression of [the] general tendency to high energy absorption and obesity'. In a letter to me he wrote 'I still feel, if you believe that evolution applies to man, that my fears of pathological growth are true'.

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Language

Our awareness project

Access June-July 'What do you think?' on abuse of language here

From Hetty Einzig, London, UK

I write as an executive coach, facilitator and leadership consultant, helping senior executives reconcile efficiency, responsibilities, values and ethics, in global companies across several countries. What your column on false and misleading terms (1) expresses is crucial in professional and personal discourse.

The importance of highlighting use, misuse and abuse of words and terms goes so much deeper than academic or national (especially the French) protection of the integrity of language in terms of finely honed conveyors of culture, communication and values. Yes, what we say and write, and what we read and think, are also political acts, especially as these engage us as parents, colleagues and citizens.

This is all part of our awareness instinct – our human ability to open our eyes despite our equally human tendency (capitalised on by power everywhere) to turn a blind eye to the accumulation of lazy deceits perpetrated in our name. We need to share in what amounts to a project to become more aware. We need to honour our humanity and stay conscious and awake and alive, able to live in blessed unrest, to see the horrors and the beauty and to keep striving, agitating, burning our flame.

Awareness leads necessarily to responsibility, which is to say, to be response-able. This is the capacity to know and thus respond appropriately and in the interests of the common good and our futures. What we really come to know, we cannot un-know, and such awakenings are never comfortable and always challenging.

English myself, and living in London while travelling a lot, I find myself exercised and perplexed (as are colleagues in other countries) at the quietude of the UK people. What has happened to our capacity to protest, agitate and demand honest actions of our politicians and leaders?

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Language
‘Mainstreaming’ the ‘stakeholder’

Access June-July ‘What do you think?’on abuse of language here

From Claudio Schuftan, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

With reference to your illuminating column on abuse of language (1), I also have words that ‘bug’ me. Two are ‘stakeholders’ and ‘mainstreaming’. Replacement of the

'stakeholders' by 'actors', or, better, 'claim holders and duty bearers' might give a hint of what is meant.

'Stakeholders' is not original UN language but business language. To have or to hold a stake in something is the same as having an interest or holding shares. 'Mainstreaming' is a term puffed up with false meaning. It should be replaced by 'incorporating' or 'introducing' with intent to influence.

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Michael Pollan

Picture postcards for foodies

Access April appraisals of Michael Pollan's work and beliefs here
Access May appraisals of Michael Pollan's work and beliefs here

From Oliver Moore, Dublin, Ireland





Dreaming of a rural idyll that was always rare? Michael Pollan is great for people with lots of money and choice, less so for those with few resources

Michael Pollan's work, celebrated in the April and May issues of *WN* (1,2), is of the picture-postcard-perfect variety for foodies. It needs to be interrogated a little. Sociologists and anthropologists who study food professionally often worry about Pollan as cultural capital. That is to say, as a way for middle class people to reinforce their place in society over 'lower' classes, and to justify the never-ending notion that the world would be a better place if only the working class tried a little harder.

Here's what anthropologist Laura DeLind from Michigan State University said in 2010 about his work (specifically his 'food principles'), and more specifically, about 'the Pollan effect'. 'The proposed diet is largely context-free and, like magic bullets and self-help manuals, taken to be sufficient in itself to generate basic food system reform. Most likely this is not what Pollan had in mind. Nevertheless, his manifesto has become so publicly lionised that it almost single-handedly fills the local food bandwagon, leaving little room for the appreciation or practice of place-based inquiry and innovation… This absence has divisive, exclusionary, and hegemonic implications'. If the world could change into a Michael Pollan one, it would have happened years ago, and the process would have been very easy. Life, unfortunately, is more complex than that.

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*Moore O. Michael Pollan. Picture postcards for foodies.[Feedback]. World Nutrition August-September 2013, **4**,7, 587-588*

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 200 and 850 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.