WN *Update*

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Editor's note. *Update* now includes more substantial contributions on big issues of public health and nutrition. Here we start with news on a report commissioned then suppressed by the UK government recommending a tax on sugar, and on the continuing fight to maintain the Mexican national tax on sugared soft drinks. Then two *WN* regular contributors: Flavio Valente denounces corporate takeover of food governance, and Carlos Monteiro celebrates the Brazilian meal-based food guide. We report on refusal of the US government to include environmental impact in its coming official dietary guidelines. *WN* regular contributor José Luis Vivero Pol in his *Vision*, insists that food is not a commodity but a common good.



WN *Sugar*

Sugar taxation. Action in the UK and Mexico

The Big Sugar team reports:

In the UK now, the sugar industry has been successfully demonised, by what amounts to a grand alliance of militant academics and health professionals, World Health Organisation and national government advisors, public interest organisations, and the very media-savvy celebrity chef Jamie Oliver (pictured below).

'Sugar is the new tobacco'. This is the view of UK Action on Sugar spokesman Simon Capewell of Liverpool University, current president of the Society for Social Medicine. Since the beginning of last year, as reflected in *WN*'s own coverage accessible above, specialist journals, serious and popular newspapers, and the electronic media, have amplified his assertion.

A big shift of attitude is now becoming fervently advocated by a large number of qualified health professionals, in particular by the activist academic Robert Lustig of the University of California at San Francisco and his growing number of supporters, and cautiously accepted by others. This is that sugar (meaning, sugars and syrups added to ultra-processed food products, not as naturally present in fresh foods) consumed in quantities typical in industrialised countries and settings, is the key cause of obesity and diabetes, and also of the multi-organ metabolic syndrome. This



In the UK, a rich mix of militant academics and health professionals, UN and national advisors, public interest organisations, media campaigns and a celebrity chef, have got Big Sugar on the run

radical position is doubted by a substantial number of specialists, but as far as we know has not been rebutted with any authority.

Most nutrition professionals have kept relatively quiet. This may be because the current focus on sugar contradicts or at least relegates the consensus view first developed in the 1960s, but now crumbling, that the main single dietary villain (aside from alcohol) is saturated fat, followed by salt, and more recently by *trans*-fatty acids.

Sugar is special

Manufacturers have been prepared to tinker with the formulation of their products so as to reduce the amount of added fat and salt. But sugar is special. It is a preservative and a bulking agent as well as a sweetener. As contained in ultra-processed food and drink products like cola drinks, breakfast cereals, biscuits, cakes, chocolate and confectionery, it is habit-forming and often quasi-addictive.

There is also a political and economic aspect special to the UK. London is the world centre of the sugar trade, dating back to the 17th century and the days of the slave trade. The World Sugar Research Organisation (WSRO), which organises funding for friendly researchers and lobbies UN agencies and national governments, is based in England. A number of UK scientists with an interest in carbohydrate metabolism, or sugar specifically, or in obesity, dental caries or diabetes, have been or are supported with funding from Big Sugar – manufacturers whose products and profits depend on sugar, or through WSRO, as are some university and research centre departments. Big Sugar in the UK and worldwide is entrenched, and very experienced in fighting off attacks, often by private agreements made with those in power.

The case for taxation

A recent development in the UK is relentless pressure from Action on Sugar and other alliances of professionals and campaigners, amplified by the media, for a tax on sugar, in particular to protect the health of children and to slow down the general rise

Box 1

Sugar and metabolic syndrome

This is a summary by Robert Lustig in the UK newspaper *The Guardian, of a small study conducted by him and colleagues at the University of California at San Francisco,* published in October in the journal *Obesity The results of the study as projected by Robert Lustig and his many supporters have made headlines worldwide, thanks to his effective advocacy.*

Epidemiologic studies demonstrate that increasing dietary sugar consumption increases diabetes risk and prevalence worldwide. Clinical studies show that markers for metabolic health deteriorate with increasing sugar in the diet. However, these studies are confounded by the calories in sugar. Is sugar dangerous because it's calories? Or because it's sugar?

Our study dissociates the metabolic effects of dietary sugar from its calories and weight gain. Instead of giving added sugar to adults to see if they got sick, we took the added sugar away from 43 obese children who were already sick, to see if they got well.

But if they lost weight, critics would argue that the drop in calories or the loss in weight was the reason for their improvement. Therefore, the study was 'isocaloric'; that is, we gave back the same number of calories in starch as we took away in sugar, to make sure they maintained their weight. For nine days we catered their meals to provide the same fat, protein, and total carbohydrate content as their home diet; but within the carbohydrate fraction we took the added sugar out and substituted starch.

We took the pastries out, we put the bagels in; we took the yoghurt out, we put the baked potato chips in; we took chicken teriyaki out, we put turkey hot dogs in. We gave them processed food – kid food – but 'no added sugar' food. We reduced their sugar consumption from 28% to 10% of their calories. They weighed themselves every day; if they were losing weight, we told them to eat more.

Dramatic results

We were astonished at the results. Diastolic blood pressure decreased by 5 points. Blood fat levels dropped precipitously. Fasting glucose decreased by 5 points, glucose tolerance improved markedly, insulin levels fell by 50%. In other words we reversed their metabolic disease in just 10 days, even while eating processed food, by just removing the added sugar and substituting starch, and without changing calories or weight. Can you imagine how much healthier they would have been if we hadn't given them the starch?

This study establishes that all calories are not the same ('a calorie is not a calorie'); substituting starch for sugar improved these children's metabolic health unrelated to calories or weight gain. While this study does not prove that sugar is the sole cause of metabolic disease, it clearly demonstrates it is a modifiable one.

The World Health Organization advises cutting sugar consumption to stop diabetes. In the US, almost half of daily consumption is in sugared beverages. The 'iron law' of public health states that reducing the availability of a substance reduces its consumption, which reduces health harms. Taxation reduces 'effective availability', and is easy to implement. Some say this is a regressive tax: the poor suffer more. But type 2 diabetes is a regressive disease, and the poor already suffer more. Taxation has worked to control tobacco and alcohol. And taxation of soda has worked in Mexico. In the UK, prime minister David Cameron needs to learn a little nutritional science, and to accept that there are more lives and money at stake than there are people who might lose their job.

in rates of obesity and diabetes. This has been flatly refused by pro-'market' UK Conservative prime minister David Cameron.

His focus is the protection of the interests of industry. In common with his health ministers, he rejects any analogy with alcohol and tobacco. Also, he expresses belief in freedom of consumer choice unimpeded by any tax (although taxes on petrol, alcoholic drinks and tobacco remain a permanent and prominent source of revenue, as does value-added tax on many consumer products).

A new development was the news in October that a report on *Sugar Reduction* compiled by *Public Health England* (PHE), a branch of the government's Department of Health, rather cautiously favours a tax on sugar:

> It is likely that price increases on specific high sugar products like sugar sweetened drinks, such as through fiscal measures like a tax or levy, if set high enough, would reduce purchasing at least in the short term.

The report states in its final recommendations that 'a successful programme could include the following levers' such as restrictions on promotions, publicity, advertising, reduction of portion sizes, reformulation, and

> 5. Introduction of a price increase of a minimum of 10-20 per cent on high sugar products though the use of a tax or levy such as on full sugar soft drinks.

Politicians lose the plot

The sweet stuff hit the fan, with the revelation that the PHE report was ready in July but had been held up – suppressed – by health minister Jeremy Hunt. Publication followed pressure from the British Medical Association, no doubt alerted by PHE staff, and from the House of Commons select committee on health. Committee chair Conservative MP Sarah Wollaston accused Jeremy Hunt of causing 'immense damage', describing his behaviour in press interviews as 'outrageous'. Public opinion polls at the time of writing show that a majority of people in the UK now favours a

Box 2

Issues with sugar taxes

The target for sugar taxation does not include sugar as naturally present in fresh foods. It is sugars and syrups added to food products. Hard-liners such as Robert Lustig who identify sugar as toxic, advocate for the tax to be imposed on sugar as such, or on specific types of product containing a lot of sugar, such as sugared soft drinks and breakfast cereals. But the result could be increase of supply and consumption of artificially sweetened products, which are also problematic. Also, the basic issue is not so much sugar in isolation, but energy-dense fatty, salty as well as sugary ultra-processed products. A broader approach is to tax a range of ultra-processed products including soft drinks irrespective of their sugar content, coupled with fiscal and other policies that make staple fresh foods cheaper. Sugar taxation is also seen as regressive – a burden on people on low incomes who subsist largely on ultra-processed products. But cost as well as misery and pain of obesity and diabetes is higher.

tax on sugar. David Cameron's office, challenged again, issued a statement saying 'The Prime Minister's view remains that he doesn't see a need for a tax on sugar'.

In the same week in the UK, *The Times* disclosed that Coca-Cola has spent millions of pounds in the UK funding research carried out by academics who question any link between sugar and obesity. Questioned, Coca-Cola corporation executives say that it relies on scientific research to guide its policies and practices. Graham MacGregor of the Queen Mary University of London, an authority on hypertension, and the adroit founder and chair of Action on Salt and now of Action of Sugar, took the opportunity to cast a wider net. In late October he demanded

> A ban on marketing of all unhealthy foods, just like cigarettes. There is no rationale for banning cigarette advertisements when unhealthy food is now a much bigger cause of death in the UK. We need also to stop price promotions in supermarkets, which are almost entirely on the most unhealthy foods, and encourage greater consumption. We also need to limit availability and portion size. If all of these actions were put into place, we could prevent the development of obesity and type 2 diabetes.

Box 3

Mexico. Winning a battle against Big Soda

In Mexico a ground-breaking law imposed taxation of 10 per cent on sugared drinks (soda and flavoured drinks), starting in January 2014. This is effective. It is expected to slow the rise in childhood obesity and in diabetes, both already very high in Mexico. Consumption has decreased, and tax revenues have increased. The Mexican congress, pressed by Big Soda, recently voted to reduce some of the tax to 5 per cent, a level likely to be ineffective. Concerted protest from citizens and from Latin American and international organisations has resulted in victory for public health. On 29 October the Mexican senate reversed the decision, as then did the congress. Many health organisations continue to press for an increase in taxation to 20 per cent, further to reduce the rates of obesity and diabetes. This will also raise more revenue, preferably to finance initiatives to benefit children's health.

The Big Sugar team. Sugar taxation. Action in the UK and Mexico
*[Big Sugar] World Nutrition November-December 2015, **6**, 11-12, 770-774*



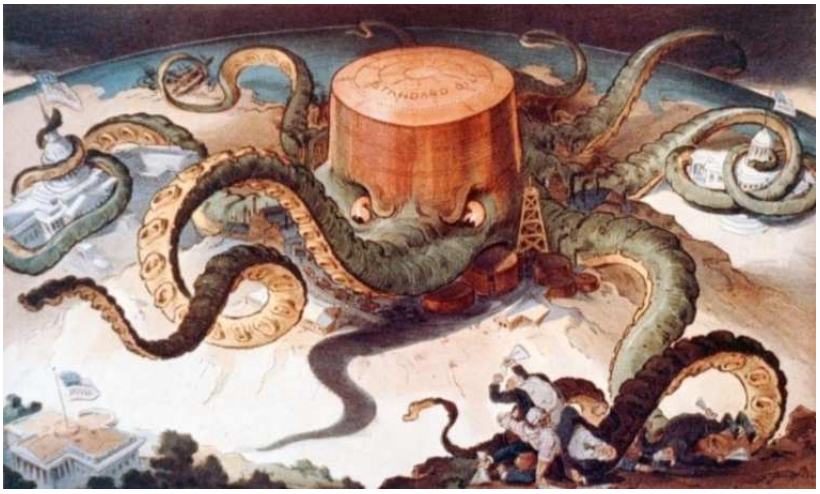
***WN** Big Food Watch*

The corporate global power grab



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Update team note. *This is an edited version of the lead paper by Flavio Valente in the new Right to Food and Nutrition Watch, on corporate capture of food and nutrition governance. It shows the strategy of transnationals, planned inside the World Economic Forum and other venues, to displace elected governments and achieve global corporate control.*



A century and more ago, vast corporations were rightly seen as monopolistic monsters, ravenous for global profit and power, as shown here. Yet despite overwhelming evidence, the transnationals of today are not yet generally seen for what they are

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Social movements, civil society organisations, and some governments, are increasingly aware of 'corporate capture' of international and national food and nutrition policy, particularly since the food price volatility crisis of 2007-08. This

crisis, like others – like of financial, energy, climate – demonstrates that the present hegemonic international 'free' trade political and economic ideology does not enable national governments to fulfil their territorial and extra-territorial human rights obligations, including the right to adequate food and nutrition.

In 2008 the UN Secretary General established a High-Level Task Force on the Global Food Security Crisis. The World Bank and the World Trade Organization, which are part of the problem, were included. Two months later the G8 group of rich and powerful governments launched a parallel public-private partnership initiative called the Global Partnership for Agriculture and Food Security, with the participation of transnational and other corporations, also part of the problem.

Before the 2007-07 food crisis there were attempts by members of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development to: 1) reduce the political mandate of the UN Food and Agriculture Organization to just providing technical assistance; 2) dismantle the Committee on World Food Security; and 3) curtail the UN Standing Committee on Nutrition, the UN harmonising body for global nutrition. OECD members believed that the 'liberalisation' of international trade would guarantee food and nutrition security with no need for global governance. The food crisis derailed some of these initiatives. The Committee on World Food Security was reformed and its mandate strengthened. UN FAO reform highlighted the need to strengthen the links between agriculture, food and nutrition. But the UN Standing Committee of Nutrition was reduced to a body with its bilateral and civil society limbs cut off.

The Global Redesign Initiative

In 2009 the corporate capture process gained impetus from the World Economic Forum investment in the Global Redesign Initiative. This built on experience with public-private partnerships. Its 600 page report, launched in 2010, establishes guidelines for corporate takeover of various areas of international and national policy, justified by alleged lack of capacity and competence of national states and the UN. Nothing is mentioned in the report about the impact of structural adjustment, the unfair international trade conditions imposed by the US and the European Union, and the strategy by the US to reduce or avoid its core contributions to the UN.

The most advanced pilot experiment in implementing the Global Redesign Initiative principles is the Global Food, Agriculture and Nutrition Redesign Initiative. According to the 2010 report, its goal is to

> Guide the development of food and agriculture policy and supportive multi-stakeholder institutional arrangements that will address current and future food and nutrition requirements within the realm of environmentally sustainable development.

The initiative appears to combine several others, including the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition, the African Green Revolution Association, the G7 New Alliance for Food Security and Nutrition for Africa, the UN High Level Task Force, – and the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) initiative.

SUN also rises

SUN is the most developed of these. It has 123 businesses as members. It emerged from a World Bank idea, is based on several initiatives by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, and is promoted by the office of the UN Secretary General. SUN argues that only issues with 'global consensus' should be focused on. This implies technical issues, and not those concerned with 'politics'.

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Malnutrition must of course be adequately addressed. It must provide the best treatment possible for the child, while also promoting the support needed by the family and the community to recover their capacity adequately to feed all their members. Excessive attention to food supplements, or the 'dumping' of food surpluses, impede healthy eating practices and local small-scale producers. But SUN emphases use of products such as ready-to-use therapeutic foods and food supplements provided by companies based in Western Europe and North America.

Policy remains to give highest priority to the first 1,000 days of child life. Originally, as described in the UN SCN's *2020 Commission Report* published in 2000, this was contextualised within the life cycle, with consideration to the social, economic, political and cultural determinants of malnutrition. But in the 1000 Days initiative as counter-proposed by the World Bank and later by SUN, this perspective has been excised. It does not address issues such as power relations, social exclusion, exploitation, poverty, discrimination, low pay, land grabbing, genetically modified organisms, the agro-industrial model as a whole, child marriage, rape and other forms of violence against women, abusive marketing of food products, or child labour, all of which can cause all forms of malnutrition and hunger. That is to say, social, economic, political and cultural causes of malnutrition are not addressed.

The 1000 Days initiative presents governments with an imaginary consensus. This emphasises the role of corporations in policy formulation. But effective and efficient policy options cannot be made, much less put in place, when an untested 'neo-liberal' approach is the only one aired in public. In response to criticism from the human rights community, SUN's Business Network, like the UN Global Compact, uses human rights language. Its principle 1 stipulates that 'businesses should support and respect the protection of internationally proclaimed human rights', and principle 2 requires businesses to 'make sure that they are not complicit in human rights abuses.' Corporations are trying to capture the human rights agenda to make it serve their interests – which is to say, 'privatising' them. Members of the SUN Business Network include food and drink corporations accused of human rights abuses.

Box 1

Realisation of the right to food

FIAN International, with the social movements and civil society organisations that constitute the Global Network for the Right to Food and Nutrition, has determined as follows. What is here takes into account the need to confront corporate capture of food and nutrition governance, and also takes into account the right to food.

The right to adequate food and nutrition embeds food sovereignty, the full realisation of women's human rights, and the indivisibility of all human rights. This returns the ownership of human rights to the peoples. It is in full accordance with the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It includes all present demands of the food sovereignty movement. It brings together national, regional and global social movements capable of creating another world based on gender equality, equity, justice, non-discrimination, human dignity, and participatory democracy to put an end to all forms of exploitation.

The peoples of the world must call on states to reject corporate capture, to reaffirm peoples' sovereignty and human rights as a fundamental step to addressing all forms of inequity, oppression and discrimination, and to democratise national and global societies. Peoples must hold their governments, and inter-governmental entities, accountable for implementation of their national and extra-territorial human rights obligations.

The obligations of states

States must:

1 Recognise people's sovereignty and food sovereignty as the source of the legitimacy of the mandate given to the state.

2 Recognise that ensuring human rights is part and parcel of the mandate given by the people to the state, and that they must hold themselves accountable for implementation of their obligations to respect, protect and fulfil human rights, and recognise the indivisibility, interrelatedness and universality of these rights.

3 Recognise that the global and national governance of food and nutrition policy must be the exclusive responsibility of national states, regulated by stringent conflict of interest procedures, in line with states' human rights obligations.

4 Recognise that human families, communities and peoples are diverse and complex entities, and that they must therefore, respect, protect and fulfil the human rights of each person, while also respecting and promoting diversity.

5 Recognise that food and nutrition, and the realisation of the right to adequate food and nutrition, are intertwined with all human rights, human activities and policy areas, to be dealt with by a holistic, multi-sectoral and participatory approach.

6 Recognise that private corporate entities are neither rights-holders nor duty-bearers. They must be considered in global and national processes as powerful third parties with strong private interests.

7 Regulate at national and international level all corporate sector initiatives that hamper or abuse the enjoyment of human rights, ensure the timely accountability of and punishment of those responsible, ensure redress for damages, and prevent repetition.

The ongoing corporate capture of nutrition threatens the achievement of food sovereignty and the full emancipation of women. It brings with it industrialised food supplements, nutrient pills and powders, and other means of food fortification that do not serve public health goals. Genetically modified crops like 'golden rice' claim to solve global malnutrition problems, but are actually a stunt to silence critics.

The life grab

The food sovereignty movement to treat food and nutrition as inseparable entities, and link food, health and nutrition with the health of the planet, is excluded in SUN or other corporate-captured agendas. Collectively managed, socially, economically and environmentally sustainable local and regional food systems based on agro-ecological principles capable of producing and offering diversified, safe and healthy dietary patterns are ignored. This form of corporate capture is a 'life grab'.

Clear signs of this threat were observed before, during and after the Second International Conference on Nutrition, held in Rome in November 2014. Civil society organisations collectively proposed that the Committee on World Food Security should harmonise and coordinate food and nutrition policies. They also stipulated that a UN SCN-like body should facilitate global and national harmonisation of food and nutrition policies, elaborate and implement the necessary programs, and report to relevant UN bodies including the UN General Assembly.

However, in early 2015, different allies of SUN clearly attempted to increase the visibility and role of SUN in the Committee on World Food Security, and in the overall structure of the UN, including by trying to consolidate the secretariat of the UN SUN Nutrition network in the World Food Programme. The Gates Foundation also has made incursions in the Committee on World Food Security. At the time of writing, the outcome is unclear.

The corporate capture of nutrition confuses women's role as mothers and providers of food and nutrition to their families with 'empowering' women. It pushes women further away from real emancipation. Emphasis must be placed on the complete fulfilment of human rights throughout the life cycle of women as equal with men, independent of their role as mothers. They must be guaranteed the right to make their own decisions, gender equality, study, work, receive equal pay, have access and control over land, choose their partners, and jointly decide whether and when they want to become mothers.

Flavio Valente was chair of the UN SCN civil society constituency, now in abeyance, from 2000 to 2007.

Valente F. The corporate global power grab
[Big Food Watch] World Nutrition November-December 2015, ***6****, 11-12, 775-779*




WN *The Food System*

Confronting the snack attack



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Healthy everyday meals are simple, as in Brazil, rice and beans with vegetables with a little meat (left) and then fruit. Feast meals like feijoada (right) are healthy when enjoyed on special occasions

Update team note. This is an edited, shortened version of an interview with WN editorial team member Carlos Monteiro in October 2015 by Digital Development Debates, published by the German federal government ministry for economic cooperation and development.

DDD. You advocate a holistic concept of nutrition that considers the body, the soul and the planet. Public health nutrition debates usually focus on individual dietary and lifestyle changes to prevent diseases and risk of disease. Why should we pay more attention to the impact of food on well-being?

Carlos Monteiro. One of our recommendations is to dedicate more time and attention to eating, to eat in company as often as possible, and to eat in pleasant and clean places. Eating is more than the intake of nutrients, and health goes beyond disease prevention. Eating well involves a state of physical, mental and social well-being. Social and cultural dimensions are also part of eating. The right modes of eating will not necessarily prevent diseases of course, but they always promote well-being, so people

can enjoy themselves more and strengthen their ties with family and friends. Often people think that health and pleasure are opposite outcomes when it comes to diet: either you go for health or you go for pleasure. In fact they are compatible. The main aim of the Brazilian food guide is to promote health, directly by preventing diseases and by improving well-being, and indirectly by promoting a food system that has a positive impact on the environment and on society as a whole.

These days slogans and packages for most food products claim to bring us 'well-being' in the form of joy, energy and happiness. You believe that the opposite is true. What is the 'snack attack', and why do we have to tackle it?

Since the 1980s foods, true foods produced by nature have been displaced, at different rates of speed. Foods and methods of preparation vary from culture to culture. But everywhere, traditional diets are made of naturally ready-to-eat foods like fruits, milk and nuts, plus foods like grains, roots and tubers, vegetables, and meat, eggs and fish that are prepared, cooked and seasoned. This is what the basic human diet consists of. The world over, traditional dietary patterns are by definition appropriate. They enabled us to become who we are as humans today.

Invasion of ultra-processed products

But in recent years, traditional dietary patterns have been threatened by ultra-processed food and drink products. In the US about 60% of all calories come from such products. In Brazil it is still only 25%. All over the world, these products are becoming more and more important. That is bad, because natural and minimally processed foods offer many advantages for our health and our well-being and they help to promote more sustainable food systems. Why should we eat ultra-processed products? They hurt us and the planet, so there is no good reason.

In general food processing is not problematic, but ultra-processed food products that destroy the structure of food –its matrix – is a serious issue.the natural food ingredients are separated, engineered and formulated to create new products. They are then ready to consume without requiring any preparation. These products can be consumed any time, anywhere, alone, and while doing other things. They induce a type of eating that is not healthy and not good for well-being. We use the term *'snack attack'* to clarify that traditional food systems and dietary patterns are being attacked. Marketing is a weapon wielded in this attack, and food guides are a counter weapon.

The Brazilian food guide

Following the WHO's Global Strategy on Diet, Physical Activity, and Health, Brazil released its revised national food guide last year. First of all, why do we need national food guides?

In the past, food guides were not so necessary because people essentially knew how to eat. People learned from or simply imitated their parents, their grandparents. Traditional dietary patterns are an important cultural asset. The problem now is that

this transmission of knowledge is being interrupted by marketing and publicity from high-revenue transnational corporations. Almost all food advertising is for ultra-processed products. Food guides provide people with correct information about food, and it is equally important to reduce people's exposure to wrong and misleading information, that is so common in food advertising.

One of our ten recommendations is directed at marketing: 'The purpose of marketing is to sell products, not to inform, much less to educate people.' It seems very obvious, but it is very important to emphasise this point. Marketing now is very aggressive, very misleading. It is important to regulate marketing, but such regulations will be pushed through only if society backs them . Food guides have become very important to convince society how important the right kind of food is.

Could you explain Brazil's innovative approach and the guide's 'golden rule'?

Our food guide was done at the behest of the Ministry of Health in Brazil, so the main focus was initially the promotion of health. We aimed to make the main messages really simple. This is why we created a golden rule - 'Eat a variety of real foods, prepare dishes and meals with these foods, and avoid ultra-processed foods.'

In order to illustrate how different types of food can be part of healthy and delicious dishes and meals, we took real examples of a recent national dietary survey instead of making abstract or theoretical recommendations. From this survey, we took the 20% of Brazilians whose diets were close to being based on our golden rule. The nutrient profile of these diets was very close to UN agencies' nutrient recommendations, but we did not start from these recommendations. We started with real, existing dietary patterns. The big advantage of this approach is that our recommendations have been tested; they are part of our food culture.

We took pictures of real breakfasts, lunches and dinners to illustrate the recommendations. People liked this. We used examples from different regions. Brazil is a big country with many different food cultures. In the food guide, people can recognise meals their parents used to eat, but which sometimes they no longer do.

The obesity pandemic

Your research suggests that an increase in obesity among the poor goes hand in hand with economic growth and development in many countries. Today, over one-fifth of the Brazilian population still lives below the poverty line. If economic development and public health are in opposition in this respect, what means, other than the food guide, does the state have to protect public health?

It is true that the distribution of obesity related to income and other socio-economic indicators is growing faster among the poor. In very poor countries, the poor are still protected from obesity in a sense because obesity is a disease that comes with consumption. Extremely poor people don't have the resources to consume ultra-processed products when they are more expensive than natural foods, such as in African countries and even in Brazil. But this is changing very fast. The products are

becoming cheaper and this is why their consumption in Brazil is increasing and why obesity is increasing at a faster rate among the poor than the rich. The poor are becoming as obese as the rich and in some countries even more obese. In countries like the US and UK where obesity is very prevalent among rich and poor people, the whole environment is problematic. People are not obese because they are poor, since rich people are obese as well. You might think it is enough to increase income and then the problem of obesity will be resolved. But that won't work.

Income and obesity

Taking a national perspective, what can programmes like Fome Zero and Bolsa Família initiated in Brazil over ten years ago achieve? What do they teach about the role of state intervention to protect and improve personal and public health?

Income-transfer programmes like *Bolsa Família* and *Fome Zero* have been very important in reducing and almost eliminating undernutrition. I started my career working on undernutrition in Brazil. With colleagues I studied its decline and demonstrated that as well as better education, adequate sanitation and safe water supply, increased income was one of the most important factors in explaining our success in fighting undernutrition. Obesity is a disease of excessive consumption; undernutrition is a disease of under-consumption, of food – and also of education, sanitation, safe water. So thanks to such social policies, there is now less inequality in terms of income and much less undernutrition, which is no longer a public health problem in most parts of Brazil.

What was the impact of income redistribution on obesity? Nothing positive. Having income, buying things, having access to decent sanitation or safe water does not help fight obesity. And this is a big challenge for Brazil. The statistics are shocking: From 2006 to 2014, the prevalence of obesity in the country has increased by almost 1 percent a year. This means there are almost two million new cases of obesity a year. The obesity situation is tragic.

If economic growth and health stand in opposition, what methods and strategies do governments have for protecting public health?

Ideally, more protection should be combined with economic growth. Sales of ultra-processed products are now stagnating or declining in high-income countries. Low-income countries aren't very interesting for corporations. But income for the poor is rising with economic growth in middle-income countries. Transnational producers of ultra-processed products are penetrating these countries and adapting their products and marketing strategies. This needs to be resisted. True foods and freshly prepared dishes should be made more attractive, accessible and affordable, and ultra-processed products less competitive.

Good and sound information, and also regulations, are needed. Brazilian manufacturers resisted our food guide, and there will be even more blowback against any policy that touches on taxation or marketing of their products. We hope that our

food guide raises awareness of this problem, thus gaining more social support that will counteract the power of the food product manufacturing, catering and marketing businesses, the media, and all entities that make money from ultra-processed products. There is growing awareness of these issues in Brazil.

In 2010 Nestlé adapted its marketing for the Brazilian market by launching its first floating supermarket in Amazonia to target remote and low-income populations. Despite such developments, and unlike most high-income countries, Brazil still retains its traditional food systems to a large extent, as you have mentioned. What can be learned from your country's way of eating?

If you look at Latin America as whole, Brazil has stayed closer to traditional dietary patterns than Mexico or Chile. Mexico has a very strong food culture, but it is also very close to the US. The markets are linked through commercial agreements and Mexicans are very exposed to US food culture. So is Chile for other reasons.

Food culture determines a country's situation. France and Italy have dietary traditions that involve consuming even fewer ultra-processed products than Brazil, whereas Germany is closer to the UK and the US. The cultural dimension of eating is as important as health, the prevention of disease, and environmental concerns.

What's for dinner?

What do you recommend to eat for dinner tonight?

Here perhaps is the only apparent contradiction between pleasure and health. If tonight is a normal sort of evening for you, eating something simple, fresh and made with care is enough. But sometimes an evening is special, and then the pleasure and cultural aspects are more important.

With traditional dietary patterns, most people do not eat what we would call a balanced diet when they celebrate. Rice and beans are eaten almost daily in Brazil, but on some days people like to enjoy a *feijoada* stew with a lot of salty and fatty pork meat (see the picture above). This is fine sometimes because it is part of Brazilian culture, and people compensate for the excess of salt and fat in the following meals. When people say 'let's have a light *feijoada'* though – that is ridiculous! When you have a *feijoada*, you have to have a real *feijoada*!

Culture and pleasure are just as important! Some days it is right to emphasise pleasure, tradition and culture more, most days it is best to emphasise health more. The important thing is not to depart very much from the food and the way that your parents and their grandparents used to eat.

Monteiro C. Confronting the snack attack.
[The Food System] World Nutrition November-December 2015, ***6****, 11-12, 780-784*

Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2015
Environment is excised



Willy Blackmore
Take Part magazine
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Update team note. *The new official Brazilian dietary guidelines include social, economic and environmental impact as of central importance. By contrast, the US government has now restricted its forthcoming official guidelines to nutrition in a narrow sense.*

The revised US federal nutrition guidelines won't be released until the end of the year, but we already know one thing that won't be included in the recommendations that inform public health policy and programs across the country: sustainability.

When the Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee released its preliminary report in February, inclusion of environmental concerns came as a shock to those who follow federal food policy – and turned the process, which happens every five years, into national news. The guidelines provide a nutritional basis for everything from food assistance program to school-lunch standards and are followed closely by private food companies. 'A lot of money rides on this advice,' says Marion Nestle, professor of food studies and nutrition at New York University. While environmentalists and some public health experts cheered the new tack the report took, the food companies balked.

Environmental impact is out

But the livestock industry won't have to contend with a federal endorsement of widespread vegetarianism or anything close to it. On 6 October, the heads of the Department of Agriculture and the Department of Health and Humans Services issued a joint statement that said environmental issues won't factor into the new standards. In revising the guidelines, the two agencies 'will remain within the scope of our mandate' said Tom Vilsack and Sylvia Burwell, the respective heads of USDA and US DHHS, which is to provide 'nutritional and dietary information and guidelines… based on the preponderance of the scientific and medical knowledge,' they added, quoting the 1990 National Nutrition Monitoring and Related Research Act.

Michele Simon, a public health lawyer who works on food issues, has spent a fair amount of time reading the law and came away with a different reading of the mandate it gives HHS and USDA. In a legal analysis published on 7 October by a coalition of environmental groups, she argued that 'the preponderance of scientific evidence' that the law says the guidelines should be based on 'tell us that food production impacts our diet, and thus should be considered as part of the Dietary Guidelines for Americans. But if there's a legal basis for including sustainability in the revised guidelines, there is no legal means of forcing the point. While the law would allow for sustainability to be included, 'it's also within their discretion to not include it, just like they've ignored science in the past, and will again, regarding the health reasons for eating less meat and more plants.' The DGAC report shows how the preponderance of scientific evidence shows that diets lower in meat are both healthier and better for the environment.

The guidelines are not legally binding; if they were, she said, 'we would have more legal options.' Previous revisions of the guidelines have expanded beyond 'eat this, not that' guidelines, as Simon noted in her legal analysis. Since 2000, both food safety and physical activity, which were first included in the dietary guidelines that year, have been squarely placed in the larger conversation about diet and nutrition in the United States.

Victory for the cattlemen

But those issues, Michele Simon said, 'were not controversial in that there was no threat' to a powerful business and lobby like the livestock industry. As such, critics see the decision to not include sustainability in the guidelines as a victory for the meat industry and other agriculture interests.

In addition to meat, the food industry has pushed back against the DGAC recommendations to limit soda intake, and how the report handles sugar and fat. 'Food lobbying groups have scored wins in Congress' Marion Nestle said, such as when pizza was declared a vegetable, 'so every food group thinks that if it complains loudly enough, Congress will respond. So far, it looks like they are right.'

Despite the huge amount of interest the DGAC report has garnered since it was released, the joint statement from Tom Vilsack and Sylvia Burwell suggests that little will change when the new standards are published later this year. The updated guidelines 'will be similar in many key respects to those of past years,' the statement reads. 'Fruits and vegetables, low-fat dairy, whole grains and lean meats and other proteins, and limited amounts of saturated fats, added sugars and sodium remain the building blocks of a healthy lifestyle.'

*Blackmore W. Environment is excised. [Dietary Guidelines for Americans] [Update] World Nutrition November-December 2015, **6**, 11-12, 785-786*

***WN** Development*

Visions for this century (9)

Brooke Aksnes writes:

In *Visions* – access the whole series up to now above –*WN* editorial team and family members have assessed the state of the world, and outlined their visions for the future. In the next issue of *WN* we will summarise the entire series, to show what we mean by 'sustainability' and 'development' in 2016-2030 and beyond, in the face of appalling and ominous political, economic and environmental circumstances, trends and forecasts.

José Luis Vivero Pol





Here is one of the rightly celebrated world series of pictures of grandmothers and their meals made with love, organised and taken by Gabriele Galimberti. This lamb in creole sauce is from Haiti
What mainly determines population well-being, health, and disease?

Common people want to pursue happiness and freedom. Elite people seek power, wealth and transcendence. And food has power, so the elite always want to control food systems and supplies, through governments and now also by corporations. These agri-food corporations only value the economic dimensions of food, namely cost of production, price in the market, profitability. And yet people see food differently, as endowed with many non-economic dimensions: food is a vital need, a

cultural pillar, a human right, an Earth's gift, as well as a good to be sold and bought. Non-economic dimensions also include cooking and eating together, and memories associated with flavours and tastes and sharing food with strangers and guests. The money-mediated identification of food as a commodity must be challenged and overcome, in order to move towards fairer and sustainable food systems that sustain well-being and healthy lives.

What mainly determines good population nutritional status?

Good nutrition is complex. UN agencies' conceptual frameworks aim to simplify such complexity. But these fail to question the mono-dimensional view of food as a private good with its nutritional implications. They see population nutritional status as an aspirational side-effect and policy goal of market-driven food systems. This is all wrong and misleading. Food is and needs to be seen as a public good. Achieving a global public good, which is to say adequate nourishing food for all, by means of food identified as a commodity made and sold to maximise profits, will never work.

How useful are the current nutritional sciences?

Here I distinguish between the political goals and the technical solutions. Politically speaking nutrition, a neglected issue for many decades, has gained a prominent place within policy agendas in the last ten years. However, the solutions presented to and by policy- makers are largely medical-technical, not political. They address symptoms, such as reducing stunting and wasting, but not the structural causes of malnutrition, such as lack of access to a privatised resource essential for all people's livelihoods and survival. Because only purchasing power determines capacity to get access to food or produce it by private means.

The quasi-medical approach to nutrition (feeding well) has won over the socio-cultural one (eating well). The former works as quick fixes, as now advocated by the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) initiative, huge philanthropic foundations, and transnational food corporations.

But the philosophy that sees meals instead of ingredients, foods instead of nutrients, and rights and entitlements instead of purchasing power, is gaining traction all over the world, as witness the world counter-hegemonic food sovereignty movement, the civic collective actions for food that are flourishing especially in the global North – and *World Nutrition.*

Are enough governments and official agencies making real progress?

Many countries are progressing in hunger reduction. But in only a few are rises in rates of obesity and diabetes slowing down. Malnutrition, by default or excess, is still growing wildly. Reduction in hunger is evident in ideologically-different governments and divergent regimes – democracies and dictatorships – but these have in common

strong governments with long-term purposes, well-designed policies and enough human, material and financial resources. That is to say, what nutritional progress is being made is not commercially driven by business executives, but state-driven by politicians and their officials.

Progress was faster and more widespread in the 1990s, the decade prior to the 2000-2015 Millennium Development Goals, which questions the much-promoted so-called MDG 'boosting effect'. Political will to reduce hunger seems to have faded away since the 2008 food crisis, leaving the task to physicians and nutritionists and information and education programmes. There has been no remarkable progress on the right to food – bleak jurisprudence at world level, permanent opposition by US and its allies, almost absence in African and Asian countries. There is weak accountability of results and financial support. How about an International Register of Commitments against Hunger for donors and recipients? Governance has been feeble, with voluntary guidelines being the norm in contrast with the stringent and binding agreements applied to food trade and intellectual property rights on seeds.

Are current dietary guidelines and nutrition education programmes effective?

Food is at the core of human health and well-being, and industrialised dietary patterns are unhealthy. But to change eating habits is difficult, because food is not just a vital need. Eating is a pleasant act associated with our culture, memories, and joy – we all can remember a great dish enjoyed on a foreign trip and the special meals our mothers made for us.

This wider context of food and nutrition, beyond nutrients and individual foodstuffs has been ignored in dietary guidelines, until the new official *Dietary Guidelines for the Brazilian Population.* By emphasising the non-nutrient dimensions of food, such as affordable ingredients, the value of food preparation, enjoyable meals eaten in company, and the pleasure of gastronomy, these guidelines are a beacon for other countries to follow.

Moreover, considering the impoverishment of our daily modern cooking and eating culture, nutrition, cooking and meal planning should be mandatory in school curricula. Adults and especially young people now have lost these skills, part of the good life well led. All governments, national, regional and municipal, should give practical knowledge of food and cooking high priority, in and out of school. This is for the common good and therefore is a public duty. What it is needed is not just advocacy campaigns, but mandatory teaching in schools, and attractive courses for adults, just as with mathematics, languages, history or natural sciences.

What types of civil society groups are most responsive to the big issues?

I am now following closely the activities of groups that are envisioning narratives and building real alternatives to the current dominant inequitable, unsustainable and broken industrial food system. Three types of civic groups are outstanding.

First, the food sovereignty movement, which consolidates customary and contemporary food producers in rural areas based on agro-ecology, and defends their livelihoods. Second, civic collective actions for food, including neo-rurals, urban hipsters, recycled hippies, and millions of everyday people that want to eat better in ways that are healthier and fairer to producers and beneficial socially, culturally and environmentally. These collectives are now flourishing all over the world and, I am sure, will start networking soon to become a 'revolutionary multitude' based on justice, conviviality, sharing, peer-production and the vital concept of the commons.

Third, I admire the work of the hundreds of food and nutrition campaigners and activists who are exposing and challenging what is so fundamentally wrong with the industrial food system, enabling the emergence of a rich variety of new ways that value food adequately. So far, these three streams of resistance or fields of struggle are on parallel pathways but they will have to converge and unite in solidarity, to reduce the power of the current industrial food system and to build a different system that provides meaningful food instead of low-cost food.

Name up to three inspiring leaders likely to be active to 2030, with reasons

I would like to mention two leading passionate and science-based individuals, and a collective entity. Firstly Olivier de Schutter, the former UN special rapporteur on the right to food, who has been relentlessly dismantling the narrative that sustains the industrial food system, and proposing sustainable and fair moves towards a real food and nutrition democracy. He is a key wise man and intellectual leader to follow. Another wise man (*Sabio* as we say in Spanish) is Jose Esquinas, a development professional and committed activist who has for more than forty years been fighting for fairer and more diverse food systems. And third, the most important agent in the ongoing food transition: the 'revolutionary crowd' that is knitting the alternative food web with thousands of alter- and counter-hegemonic collective actions for food. Those innovative actions regard food not as a mere commodity but a multi-dimensional vital resource for all humans to enjoy.

Identify up to three of your greatest fears, with reasons

First I fear a corporate-ruled world in which citizens degenerate into consumers, and all resources are privatised for profit-making. A 'brave new world' in which money can purchase anything and anyone, and transnational corporations displace elected governments in decision making power and sovereignty – the strategy of the World Economic Forum to achieve hegemony of 'neo-liberal' dogma. I also fear the hegemony of neo-liberal ideas –the 'mono-cultures of the mind' as described by Vandana Shiva – constraining alternatives only within the bounds the ruling elite dictate. This would exclude inspiring visions, such as considering food as a commons or having a universal food scheme that guarantees that everybody can eat adequate food every day, however impoverished they are. Third, I am convinced my daughter will inherit a world much worse than the one I live in. Climate hazards, glyphosate-

induced cancer, and semi-slavery working conditions will, I fear, be much more common when she grows up to adulthood, unless the 'revolutionary crowd' triumphs.

Identify up to three of your greatest hopes, with reasons

These are the reverse of my fears. I hope that all important domains of life become regained and re-commonified by all of us who oppose 'neo-liberal' politics and economics. After decades of purchasing and consuming degraded food products in supermarkets, I hope that people understand the horrible effects and implications of such products, and enable the protection and flourishing of a countless variety of healthy and fairer food systems. I hope that people everywhere care more about the food they eat, and are prepared to value food multi-dimensionally and to pay more to food producers in shorter and healthier supply systems. Such citizens will insist on stringent control of transnational food corporations, with regulations that restrict and tax ultra-processed food, and instead, build alternative food systems they want. Rights are not given but taken.

My greatest hope is to see food freed from being a mere commodity, just as people who were once slaves became free from being commodities two centuries ago because morals changed. The same must happen with food, and for similar philosophical reasons. Absolute privatisation of food is a social construct and hence it is in our hands to reverse it. So I envision a world in which food becomes and remains a common good for the commonwealth.

Make any other remarks as you may wish

Just two quotes that summarise my hopes to crowd-feed the world with a meaning:

> *Mucha gente pequeña, en lugares pequeños, haciendo cosas pequeñas pueden cambiar las cosas.*
> Many small people, in small places, doing small things, can change things.
>
> *Eduardo Galeano*

> There are those who fight for one day, and they are good. There are those who fight for one year, and they are better. There are those who fight for many years, and they are very good. But there are those who fight their entire lives: they are the irreplaceable ones
>
> *Bertolt Brecht*

Be one of those.

*Vivero Pol JL.Development. Visions for this century: 9 [Update]. World Nutrition November-December 2015, **6**, 11-12, 787-791*