



## **Global standard-setting committee puts child health before trade**

**38<sup>th</sup> Codex Alimentarius Nutrition Committee, Hamburg, Germany  
7<sup>th</sup> December 2016**

Codex Alimentarius, the FAO/WHO body that sets global trading standards for food, today decided to put the interest of child health above trade when, in a breakthrough consensus, the Committee agreed to include reference to WHO's recommendations for strict controls on the marketing and labelling of formulas for babies over six months.<sup>i</sup> Today's development should help governments halt the inappropriate marketing of these products, including cross-branding with formulas for infants.

IBFAN – the 37-year-old global network that works to protect the rights of parents to accurate, independent information and has been calling for such safeguards since these products were invented - warmly welcomed this radical change of direction. Codex' standard-setting is a long-drawn out process. This revised standard work, started in 2013, is expected to complete in 2019.<sup>ii</sup>

Bad diet is now acknowledged to be the biggest cause of death and disability and the costs of diet-related diseases are fast consuming health budgets. The EU in particular highlighted its concern with the growing obesity rates in children in the EU.

As usual 43% of the 300 participants in the room were from food and related industries – either as Business Interest NGOs (BINGOs) or sitting on government delegations – even speaking for them. In this compromised Codex environment, standards that facilitate trade can often take precedence over the Codex mandate to protect public health.

The aggressive marketing of the baby food industry misleads and confuses parents, undermines breastfeeding. For example, Nestlé is currently promoting to health professionals in Botswana a new acidified 'growing-up milk' *Pelargon 3*<sup>iii</sup> with unsubstantiated claims that it: *reduces the risk of infection from: Dirty water; Child Minding/Day care; Exposure when travelling and Exposure in warm, wet seasons.*

These processed, expensive, sweetened and flavored milks targeting 6-36 month old children account for 50% of absolute growth in a formula market that is set to rise by 55% from US\$45 billion to US\$70 billion by 2019.<sup>iv</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> WHA Resolution 69/9. May 2016 *Ending inappropriate promotion of foods for infants and young children* [http://apps.who.int/gb/ebwha/pdf\\_files/WHA69/A69\\_R9-en.pdf](http://apps.who.int/gb/ebwha/pdf_files/WHA69/A69_R9-en.pdf)

*Maternal, infant and young child nutrition Guidance on ending the inappropriate promotion of foods for infants and young children* [http://apps.who.int/gb/ebwha/pdf\\_files/WHA69/A69\\_7Add1-en.pdf](http://apps.who.int/gb/ebwha/pdf_files/WHA69/A69_7Add1-en.pdf)

<sup>ii</sup> IBFAN welcomed the support of ILCA, IACFO and HKI in their advocacy to improve the standard. The NGOs and many Member States are calling for a clear statement that the products are not necessary – in both the standard and on labels (infant formula can continue to be used after 12 months). Since the composition of the products is not yet finalised it is important countries are free to prevent their import if they are considered to pose a risk to health.

<sup>iii</sup> Aside from all the other claims made for this product the term “growing up” is itself an unsubstantiated claim.

<sup>iv</sup> *ICDC Focus: aggressive Promotion: Growing Up Milks* [www.babymilkaction.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/GUMs-NEW.2016.pdf](http://www.babymilkaction.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/GUMs-NEW.2016.pdf)