

International Baby Food Action Network (IBFAN)



140th session of the Executive Board Agenda item 10.1: Preparation for the third High-level Meeting of the General Assembly on the Prevention and Control of Non-communicable Diseases, 2018

IBFAN recognises the difficulties facing WHO and Member States tackling NCDs. However, we have watched with growing alarm as the Global Coordinating Mechanism – before and after the adoption of FENSA - has given disproportionate access and promotion to a wide range of corporations and public private partnerships. The GCM shows no sign of heeding WHO's FENSA requirement to *“exercise particular caution...when engaging with private sector entities ...whose policies or activities are negatively affecting human health..”*

Now the GCM proposes an annual self-reporting mechanism for NSAs that we believe will mislead the public and policy makers alike. Although it is welcome that NSAs are ‘encouraged’ to submit only actions within their core area of business, spurious marketing strategies masquerading as health initiatives could be registered and so gain credibility from the image transfer from WHO. The baby food industry hijacking of World Breastfeeding Week, for example. The promotion of voluntary – here today, gone tomorrow – initiatives, can also undermine government resolve to bring in effective legislation.

Since WHO admits that it does not have the capacity to ‘quality assure’ all activities and guarantee that they are in conformity with WHO policy, this idea should be abandoned. It is far too risky.

Last, we call on WHO to be consistent in its messaging. On the one hand WHO emphasises micronutrients – on the other, it encourages consumption of fresh fruit, vegetables and minimally processed, bio-diverse foods and of course breastfeeding. Over-emphasis on single nutrients opens the door to idealising health and nutrition claims on less healthy processed products. The public meanwhile is unaware that high heat processing and storage can destroy essential nutrients in these products.

You could stare at a banana all day and not see the nutrients it contains. Whereas a glance at a package laden with nutrition claims immediately inspires confidence.

We are keen to continue working with WHO to address this challenge