Politics of ultra-processed products

International Scientific Webinar on WBW 2020, 31st August 2020
Patti Rundall, Policy Director, Baby Milk Action
IBFAN Global Council
Things that businesses want and what we should remember
“The top strategic priority of many transnational marketing and media businesses (who have contributed to the NCD epidemic) is to change traditional food patterns and cultures in lower and middle-income countries.”

Prof Philip James, the founder of the Obesity Task Force
“.... international capital at the top is mobile and is running circles around governments....”

US Economist, Prof Jeffrey Sachs, BBC Radio 4
Using the tobacco playbook

https://worldnutritionjournal.org/index.php/wn/article/view/155
Baby food industry uses all 6 tactics:

1. Hijack political and legislative processes;
2. Exaggerate their economic importance;
3. Manipulate public opinion to appear respectable;
4. Use front groups (astroturfing*)
5. Discredit proven science; and
6. Intimidate governments with litigation.

* [www.babymilkaction.org/archives/25523](http://www.babymilkaction.org/archives/25523)
BIG SNACK pretends to be BIG FOOD

- products *not* essential to health
- highly processed snacks eaten between meals or replace meals
- such companies not ‘part of the solution’
Risks of Ultra Processed products

- **Ultra-processed foods and NCDs:**
  - cardiovascular disease, diabetes, Type 2 Diabetes, cancer, depression, mortality, plastic packaging...
  - Higher energy density, more free sugar and saturated and trans fats
  - Less dietary fibre, protein, vitamins and minerals and bioactive compounds.
  - Overall deterioration of the nutritional quality (shown in national studies of 10 middle- and high-income countries)

- Thanks to Dr. Maria Laura Louzada, PhD
  Assistant Professor, Dept of Nutrition, USP, Brazil
Breastmilk substitutes (BMS), many other globally traded products are Ultra-Processed

• Aside from contamination and adulteration, in order to stay on the shelves for 2 years, BMS contain non food ingredients. Chemical additives are used to stabilize, emulsify, thicken, regulate acidity, and act as anti-oxidants.

• These are all “permitted” by Codex Alimentarius standards*, some at regulated levels and others according to “good manufacturing practices”, with their safety declared not by independent and convincing science but on the basis of political consensus and claims of “history of safe use”.

• Increasingly BMS are using Palm oil and other ingredients that are derived from deforestation – legal or illegal.

• Many products are now in single use plastic packaging

* IBFAN recent Codex comments: www.babymilkaction.org/archives/24252
Codex Alimentarios sets benchmarks used by the World Trade Organisation.

Codex is riddled with COI Typically: 40% are food industry, 59 as Business Interest NGOs (BINGOS).

Businesses are often invited to speak for governments.

GAIN at Codex in 2013, promoting fortified supplements while undermining foods such as eggs.
Over-emphasis on nutrients risks promoting ultra processed products

Stare at a banana all day and you will not see the nutrients it contains.

A quick glance at a package laden with health and nutrition claims immediately inspires confidence – even though many of the important nutrients have been destroyed by the high processing and storage.
misleading claims in Botswana

Dear Healthcare Professional,

NESTLÉ LAUNCHES THE FIRST ACIDIFIED GROWING UP MILK IN SOUTHERN AFRICA.

NAN PELARGON
Growing Up milk is now available for toddlers!

Growing Up Milk supports the rapid growth and nutritional requirements of pre-school children compared to regular milk.1-2

Growing Up Milk provides:
- Higher content of key micronutrients: Vitamin A, Iron, Zinc
- Lower protein content compared to regular cow’s milk
- High content of essential fatty acids

REduces risk of infection from:
- Dirty water
- Child missing day care
- Exposure when travelling
- Exposure in warm, wet seasons

Acidification with lactic acid has been shown to:
Suppress the growth of certain pathogenic bacteria

NAN PELARGON 3:
Formulas promoted as ‘protection’: Latin America

Similac® 3 con HMO*
Easy to promote as essential nutrients

Sugar
24.4 g / 200ml

Sodium
• 1108 mg/100g
• 803.3 mg/serve
How industry changed the conversation to get a place at the table

• “We are not like tobacco.”
• “Everyone needs food.”
• “We are not the problem – we are part of the solution...”
Tying corporations up in regulatory straightjackets is unnecessary when companies such as Nestlé already have sound principles and core values.”

Peter Brabeck, Nestle Chair and CEO, AGM 2010. Vice-Chairman, Foundation Board, World Economic Forum.
But...the baby food market was built on trust

“In less developed countries, the best form of promoting baby food formulas may well be the clinics which the company sponsors”

Busy health workers in South Africa relied on Nestle ‘milk nurses’ to inform mothers.

Nestlé in Developing countries 1970
Why Conflicts of Interest safeguards matter

Bill Gates’ climate-change investment firm bets on lab-produced breast milk

Published Tue, Jun 16, 2020 - 9:14 AM EDT | Updated Tue, Jun 16, 2020 - 2:31 PM EDT

Aditi Ray, Markets Reporter, CNBC

**KEY POINTS**

- Biomilq is targeting infant nutrition by attempting to reproduce mother’s breast milk in a lab.
- The start-up has just earned the backing of the world’s top investors, by raising $3.5 million in Series A funding from Breakthrough Energy Ventures, Bill Gates’ investment firm focused on climate change.
- The co-founders hope that the breast milk produced by Biomilq from culturing mammary epithelial cells will help reduce the carbon footprint from the global infant formula market.
Some examples of problematic partnerships
Babies are the perfect entry point for market-driven solutions, such as SUN and GAIN.

Many development NGOs and agencies are dependent on food sponsorship.
SUN Promotes:
• enhanced private sector access to policy-setting;
• short-term medicalized solutions;
• intensive agriculture and technologies such as GMO and biofortification;
• market-led approaches to food fortification

SUN ignores:
• The **commerciogenic** causes of malnutrition;
• sustainable, culturally appropriate local foods;
• the concerns of communities most affected by hunger and malnutrition
• **undermines effective conflict of interest regulations**
• [www.babymilkaction.org/archives/24042](http://www.babymilkaction.org/archives/24042)
• **WEF’s Global Redesign Initiative** proposes that issues are taken off the agenda of the UN system and are addressed instead by ‘*plurilateral, often multi-stakeholder, coalitions of the willing and the able*.’

• WEF envisages a world managed by a coalition of multinational corporations, nation states (including through the UN System) and 'select’* civil society organisations.

*corporate funded*
Problematic partnerships

• UN Strategic Partnership Agreement with the World Economic Forum (WEF).

• FAO partnership with Danone to scale up sustainable food and agricultural practices and provide people with access to more diverse and healthier foods.
IBFAN opposes BMS Call to Action* – it gives companies 10 year licence and could usher in partnerships that would derail the Code

The controversy over BMS marketing is holding back private sector from making a more positive contribution to global nutrition challenges.

Formula companies are prohibited from joining many global initiatives and partnerships.

Issue contributes to general distrust of private sector among global nutrition stakeholders.

To further progress, the Call to Action takes an approach to directly appeal to companies to take action, supplementing advocacy, social behavior change, and consumer education.

*www.babymilkaction.org/archives/25260
“All too often the education process is entrusted to people who appear to have no understanding of industry and the path of progress...The provision of education is a market opportunity and should be treated as such”

European Round Table of Industrialists, 1988

Since 1992 Nestlé has been sponsoring nutrition education programs in schools all over the world.
Key messages

• Remind your government – especially if it is a member of SUN - of their legal duty to protect human(and planetary) rights to health - free from commercial influence

• **Terminology matters:** *Partnership* implies shared governance and values. *Use carefully.* (UNICEF guidance: *Response to COVID-19: Guidance Note on Financial Contributions or Contributions in-kind from Food and Beverage companies Version 2*)

• ‘**Inclusiveness**’ is also problematic.

• Be wary of over-emphasising individual nutrients with health and nutrition claims – this can lead to promotion of ultra-processed foods.

• Promote policies that protect biodiversity, such as legislation to stop land and sea grabbing, deforestation, single use plastic packaging etc.

*www.babymilkaction.org/archives/24184*
THANK YOU!

www.babymilkacton.org
www.ibfan.org
http://www.babymilkaction.org/archives/24184
http://www.babymilkaction.org/archives/24341