companies exploit COVID-19 for profit

worrying global initiatives

ultra-processing - risks to health and biodiversity

risks of multi-stakeholder partnerships

astro-turfing - can you recognise it?
The Covid-19 pandemic continues to be devastating for everyone and shows why UN bodies, especially WHO, should be protected from commercial and undue political influence if they are to protect human rights, equitable access to treatments and a safer, more humane world. During the Aids pandemic, fear of transmission understandably led to replacement feeding with subsequent increases in infant mortality. Commercial exploitation of the fear of COVID-19 transmission is now eclipsing evidence-based advice. Thankfully, WHO and UNICEF who are updating advice regularly, are highlighting breastfeeding’s life-saving importance in helping destroy harmful pathogens, and build resistance to so many threats. They also warn of the risks of breastmilk substitutes. See cover to see how Nestlé’s marketing implies – with no sound evidence, that its HMO (Human Milk Oligosaccharide) builds immunity. WHO and UNICEF advise that mothers, including those with suspected or confirmed COVID-19, be supported to remain with their infants and practice skin-to-skin. Although many countries have adopted their recommendations, breastfeeding rates have dropped by 40-50% in some hospitals. In India, before the pandemic, 41% of babies were breastfed in the first hour; but rates are now falling, fuelled by increased marketing. In a BMJ report, IBFAN’s Dr Arun Gupta, explains: “It takes years to take breastfeeding rates up by even 1%... In the last 10 years the breastfeeding rate in India has gone up by 5%. The covid crisis could set us back many years”.

Thus in the first hour, participating in the call, companies should be able to concoct an acceptable commitment. Indeed, Nestlé already claims to be code compliant. Although ATNI claims to be independent” it was designed from the outset to whitewash tricky issues and judgements handed to the body that aims to end malnutrition. We believe this to be a false assertion that will derail and delay full Code compliance. The Initiatives on these pages give companies plenty of opportunities to cosy up to policy makers as partners – in exchange for here today gone tomorrow promises. Often forgotten is that ‘partnerships’ are, by definition, arrangements for ‘shared governance’ to achieve ‘shared goals and benefits’. Indeed shared decision-making is their single most unifying feature. Since the primary duty of all corporations is to their shareholders - those wanting to protect health and the planet would wise to be careful.

Industry-friendly ‘BMS Call to Action’ gives companies a 10-year licence to harm children.

IBFAN has denounced a new cleverly-worded Breastmilk Substitutes Call to Action (BMS Call) which its supporters say is a fresh – industry savvy strategy to improve Code compliance. We believe this to be a false assertion that will instead usher in inappropriate partnerships that will delay full Code compliance. The Call was drafted by the Meridian Institute and 6 non-governmental-organisations, many funded by food corporations, the Gates Foundation and other industry-linked philanthropies.

Who should govern? Everyone is under greater financial pressure due to Covid and baby food companies are first in line to offer ‘help’ in any nutrition related projects. The initiatives on these pages give companies plenty of opportunities to cosy up to policy makers as partners – in exchange for here today gone tomorrow promises. Often forgotten is that ‘partnerships’ are, by definition, arrangements for ‘shared governance’ to achieve ‘shared goals and benefits’. Indeed shared decision-making is their single most unifying feature. Since the primary duty of all corporations is to their shareholders - those wanting to protect health and the planet would wise to be careful.
Multistakeholderism and the global trade of UPFs

“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, 2012

IBFAN has been concerned about the risks of multi-stakeholder partnerships and in particular, Scaling up Nutrition (SUN) for many years. Our research and analysis with FIAN and SID, When the Sun Casts a Shadow, explores SUN’s human rights risks in Guatemala, Uganda and India and was finally published in February. We found that SUN’s market-led approach:

- favors short-term medicalised and technical solutions, supplements, fortification, promotional claims (forbidden for all foods for infants and young children by WHA Res 63.23) in ways that can undermine confidence in breastfeeding and biodiverse, culturally appropriate local foods.
- promotes intensive agriculture and technologies that benefit food and agro-industry. (Biofortification is a deceptive term covering all forms of agriculture, including GM, was rejected by the Codex Nutrition Committee.)
- SUN’s interpretation of inclusiveness enhances and legitimises corporate influence on nutrition policy setting and public affairs in line with the World Economic Forum’s Global Redesign Initiative.
- ignores the commeriogenic causes of malnutrition and the concerns of communities most affected by hunger and malnutrition.
- attempts to appea a broad and inclusive people’s ‘movement’ but is a public-private hybrid;
- undermines effective conflict of interest regulations.

Infant feeding in Emergencies

We are a founder member of the Infant Feeding in Emergencies Group (IFE) set up in 1999 to ensure good emergency preparedness responses. Emergencies are useful entry points for companies establishing markets. (1994 Bosnian appeal) In order to protect IFE’s essential work we helped establish a COI policy for IFE members.
We are very grateful to First Steps Nutrition for taking over the Secretariat of the Baby Feeding Law Group, the coalition of health professional and mother-support groups that we founded in 1997. The First Steps website has important and independent information.

- We work with many networks on trade. See our presentation on US UK trade agreements at the All Party Parliamentary Group on infant feeding and inequalities, our No deal and other blogs.

**Conflicts of Interest success:**
The UK Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health (RCPCH) was a founder member of the BFLG and has played a key role in strengthening EU legislation over the years. However its funding policy weakened under the Presidency of Prof Modi, who joined Nestlé’s Advisory Board at the end of 2018. After her Presidency ended the RCPCH decided to end all funding from formula companies in February 2019. The BMJ followed suit in April 2019. Thanks to all who helped campaign for this change.

- We hope the Brazilian Pediatric Society will distance itself from the Nestlé J.Pedia e-learning programme for young medical students.

**Useful links:**
- **India**: Webinar on Covid and Breastfeeding
- **Bangladesh**: Environmental issues and UPFs
- **UPFs impact on health**: The Politics of UPFs
- **How UPFs took over our shopping baskets**
- **The rise of UPFs - why they’re really bad for health**
- **The brands turning Indonesian Instagram into ads**
- **US Petition-on-toddler-milks**
- **IBFAN and EU NGOs leave EU Diet Platform**
- **IBFAN statement of World Food Safety Day June 7, 2020**
- **WBTi Evaluation -Tracking National actions in Europe and more**
- **First Steps Infant formula claims**
- **Wikipedia: Astroturfing**
- **Zero Separation**

The 3rd joint report by WHO, UNICEF and IBFAN reveals that 136 (70%) of the 194 countries analysed, have in place some form of legal measure related to the Code with 44 improving their laws in the last two years. Where these laws are strong and well implemented, health workers and families are protected. Clearly more must be done – but difficult when companies pressure governments to rely on voluntary promises or laws full of loopholes (see left).

**Wikipedia: Astroturfing** is the practice of masking the sponsors of a message or organization (e.g., political, advertising, religious or public relations) to make it appear as though it originates from and is supported by grassroots participants. It is a practice intended to give the statements or organizations credibility by withholding information about the source’s financial connection.

**Is ‘Zero Separation’ Astrofturfing?**

Zero Separation is a campaign launched by the European Foundation for the Care of Newborn infants (EFCNI). The campaign calls for mothers and babies to be kept together – something we would all support (see Cover and page 2). However a closer look reveals that the US baby food company Abbott was its first funder in 2008, followed by the Nestlé Nutrition Institute, DSM, Prolacta Bioscience® Inc and others who push fortifiers, bottles etc. The EFCNI Funding Policy is misleading and falsely reassuring: “The EFCNI Funding Policy is... will not enter into initiatives which contravene [the Code]... EFCNI accepts financial donations from milk manufacturers. EFCNI will not provide direct endorsement of infant milk products e.g. logo on packaging or promotions which promote infant formula instead of breastfeeding.” Thanks to the Global Breastfeeding Collective for not promoting Zero Separation during World Breastfeeding Week.

Update 49 includes a selection of stories from Patti Rundall’s Policy Blog. Baby Milk Action does not accept corporate funding so our members’ support is important for our independence and freedom to speak out.

To join or donate: www.babymilkaction.org/shop