



IBFAN COMMENT
PROPOSED DRAFT GUIDELINES ON FRONT-OF-PACK NUTRITION LABELLING
At Step 3.

General Comments

Front of Pack Nutrition Labeling (FOPNL) can be a means to provide additional information to those who purchase pre-packaged foods and provide a system for making decisions about food products available in the market place. Moreover it has the potential of reducing consumption of food ingredients and products that contribute to unhealthy diets.

A number of underlying principles are essential for the effective implementation of FOPNL policies.

- For FOPNL to be effective IBFAN considers a mandatory system of WARNINGS to be much preferred. Research of countries where FOPNL has been voluntary shows limited uptake by the food products industries and hence the ability for product comparisons is compromised and the expected health benefits are under realized.
- Processed complementary food products and formulas for infants and young children should not have FOPNL as this will be promotional of certain products over other products and contrary to the provisions of the International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes and subsequent WHA resolutions. To effectively safeguard infant and young child health, it is preferable to have warnings on these products.
- Codex must address the environmental impact of the global trade in unnecessary food products. ***The United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) estimates that 21–37% of total greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions are attributable to the food system and that climate change will have important negative impacts on food security.*** Green lighting the ultra-processed, excessively packaged with plastic/styrofoam products may reduce the consumption of a few harmful food ingredients yet will continue contributing to increasingly alarming levels of environmental degradation.

- In view of the need to safeguard policy setting from commercial influence, IBFAN believes that the business term ‘stakeholder’ is removed from all Codex texts. Advocating for public health goals/objectives is very different from seeking commercial/profit ones. It is misleading to group all constituents under this term.

Specific Comments

It is critical that the implementation and policy setting for FOPNL be led by national governments who are accountable and responsible for the overall health and nutrition of their citizens. To fulfill their obligations governments must ensure that policy development is free of commercial influence while ensuring adequate participation from civil society, independent academics, health associations, and other relevant constituencies.

We see no need for a Codex text to list collaboration or consultation with specific interested parties since this is likely to open the door to abuse and legitimise corporate lobbying – placing the businesses on the same level as all other actors. Governments have a duty to protect citizens and ensure appropriate consultations.

Principle 4.3.1 *The text should read:*

FOPNL should be government led and developed in collaboration with all interested parties including government, consumers, academia, public health associations, private sector among others, by ensuring robust safeguards against conflict of interest.

Section 2.2 Exclusion for foods and products intended for infants and / or young children

Commercial foods and products intended for infants and young children should not be included in the guidelines for FOPNL.

The International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes and subsequent resolutions of the World Health Assembly govern the labeling and marketing of a number of these products. These include infant formulas, formulas for special medical purposes, follow-up formulas and drinks for young children. A number of Code provisions also cover complementary foods for older infants and young children.

Claims are not permitted by Codex Guidelines on Nutrition and Health Claims or WHA Resolution 63.23 that urges Member States *“To end inappropriate promotion of foods for infants and young children and to ensure that claims not be permitted for foods for infants and young children”*

The FOPNL would be contrary to provisions in the International Code as they are promotional in essence by preferring one product to another. This may lead parents and care givers to perceive these products as being endorsed by government authorities and thus have a negative impact on breastfeeding decision-making. In effect FOPNL on formulas for infants and children will have a negative impact on infant and young child health.

Similarly complementary food products should not be included. These products are highly processed and their consumption should be discouraged. Older infants and young children fed processed complementary foods risk dental caries, obesity and develop preferences for bland “white” foods. Ultra-processed products invariably contain chemical additives to stabilize, emulsify, thicken, regulate acidity, and act as anti-oxidants etc. Many ingredients are “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”.

Public health nutrition policy promotes the consumption of healthy nutritious foods for optimal health and development as well as the development of life long preferences for healthy foods. FOPNL in these situations can act as a marketing tool for the consumption of inappropriate ultra-processed food products at a vulnerable stage of growth and development.