

IBFAN Briefing on SUN and GAIN

ICN2 Rome November 2014

The INTERNATIONAL BABY FOOD ACTION NETWORK (IBFAN) is a 35 year-old global network that works to protect, promote and support breastfeeding and food-based complementary feeding, in realization of a child's right to health and adequate food. IBFAN is committed to working with governments, the United Nations and other organisations to address child survival and to draw the world's attention to strategies that tackle malnutrition in a just, equitable and sustainable way, giving priority to peoples' ability to produce and access nutritious bio-diverse foods locally.

The Scaling up Nutrition (SUN) was launched by the World Bank, UNICEF, WFP and WHO, some governments and NGOs, in 2010. SUN claims to be a "global movement" that "aims to improve nutrition...and treat malnutrition." It is governed by a Lead Group with members from governments, civil society, several UN agencies, donor agencies, businesses and foundations.¹

"...the Scaling Up Nutrition is not an initiative approved by the set of countries members of the UN."

Official comment to the ICN2
Brazilian National Council on Nutrition. 2014

The SUN Movement Multi-Partner Trust Fund (MPTF), established in 2012, enlists the support of "multiple national and international stakeholders including government departments, civil society, responsible businesses, donors [such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF) and UN system agencies]"

SUN now has 54 participating countries. Its strategy for acquiring members is often to approach individual policy-makers rather than use democratic governmental processes. So overnight, before any open discussion with relevant actors has taken place, people are finding themselves in a SUN country. Governments are led to believe that if they care about nutrition they should become a 'SUN' country and that by doing so they might increase their chances of external financial support.

PROMOTION OF PLATFORM WITH BUSINESS

SUN correctly recognizes that malnutrition has multiple causes and that actions to mitigate it must be multi-sectoral. The SUN 'model' for tackling malnutrition relies on the setting up of multi-stakeholder platforms with businesses as a core strategy.

"SUN is structured around five networks of equal weight: from the countries, organizations of the civil society, the UN agencies, the business sector, and the donors."

Official comment to the ICN2
Brazilian National Council on Nutrition. 2014

SUN now claims that these platforms should be 'government-led'. However, it does not have in place adequate safeguards to stop powerful corporations and their front groups gaining unprecedented opportunities

to influence nutrition policy setting and so facilitate unsustainable market-driven policies. Fundamental to SUN's Strategy 2012-2015 is the provision of fortified foods and micronutrients for the treatment of mild and moderate malnutrition, the effectiveness of which remains questionable. 77% of Ready-to-Use fortified foods (RUFs) are exported from the EU and US. SUN's budgetary priorities favour fortified food products, while leaving the underlying causes of all forms of malnutrition and action to prevent them poorly funded.

SUN's Strategy also ignores scientific evidence that consumption of industrially processed high salt, sugar and fat foods (HSSF foods), contributes to Non Communicable Diseases (NCDs), whose costs are steadily overwhelming families and governments. The marketing and global trade of such foods with health and nutrition claims undermines confidence in normal, local, culturally appropriate family foods.

SUN'S BUSINESS NETWORK is designed to provide opportunities for businesses to engage in activities such as 'product development', 'distribution channels' to address nutrition needs. The SBN is chaired by GAIN (a multi-stakeholder hybrid organization) and is comprised of 40 global companies that claim to be committed to reaching over 127 million women and children with improved nutrition by 2020. Many SBN members manufacture and promote the consumption of HSSF foods and inappropriate agricultural technologies such as genetic modification, seed and commodity monopolies and mono-cropping - all of which contribute to rising seed and food prices and soil depletion.

Although manufacturers of breastmilk substitutes who are known to violate the *International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes* are supposed to be excluded from SUN, how such decisions are taken is not clear. Through a complex web of SBN partnerships a wide range of companies are encouraged to exploit the commercial potential of the first 1000 days, fuelling fears that breastfeeding and family foods are insufficient without micronutrient supplements and fortified foods.

Manufacturers of foods high in fat, sugar and salt (HFSS foods) are partnering with GAIN to conduct research on nutrition and are testing their products on malnourished populations.



SOME SUN BUSINESS NETWORK MEMBERS:

PEPSI, the global manufacturer of sugary drinks, plans to set up market-based solutions to address malnutrition in Ethiopia and other African countries.

CARGILL globally controls the trade in agricultural commodities.

UNILEVER another global manufacturer with many brands, from ice cream to soap. So far UNILEVER is focusing on promoting its Lifebuoy soaps through championing hand washing including using health workers and school children as its promoters; this strengthening of its brand image has resulted in higher sales of its various processed foods also, especially in Indonesia .

AJINOMOTO manufacturer of monosodium glutamate (MSG) and foods for lactating women and for infants. Britannia, the snack food company, used GAIN's influence to persuade the Indian government to distribute its biscuits in school meals and aims to reach one million children by 2016.

DSM one of the largest manufacturers of micronutrient powders and baby formula ingredients, aims to reach 50 million pregnant and lactating women, children and adults each year by 2020.

NUTRISET, producer of Plumpy Nut, PlumpyDoz, and other peanut based products pushed as solutions to prevent and manage malnutrition, aims to reach 9 million children each year by 2018.

SYNGENTA a seed company that promotes the use of GMO technologies.

MARS INC manufactures chocolates and other high sugar confectionery.

SUN'S CONFLICTS OF INTEREST (COI) PROCESS - PROMOTING TRUST NOT VIGILANCE.

As a result of criticism by public interest organizations, SUN has now started a process proposing key principles of engagement for SUN participants to prevent, identify, manage and monitor conflicts of interest. Using \$1million funding from the Gates Foundation (BMGF) SUN has engaged the Global Social Observatory (GSO), a Geneva-based organization, to facilitate the process. Yet GSO itself is not free from conflicts of interest. It represents business interests and receives corporate funding. The GSO Reference Note to governments is problematic. It redefines Conflicts of Interest in order to fit and legitimize SUN's flawed multi-stakeholder governance structure (which has businesses on its decision-making board).

SOME FUNDAMENTAL FLAWS WITH SUN'S COI PROCESS:

- It focuses on 'trust' and collaboration rather than encouraging governments to exercise caution, apply an [at] arm's length' approach and set up sound policies of engagement with the corporate sector.
- It confuses conflicts of interest with conflicts caused by disagreements and differences in opinions.
- It promotes as good governance inclusiveness of all 'stakeholders' (an industry term)
- It covers COI only national level, not SUN's international decision-making level (Lead group)
- It lacks whistleblower protection.

GAIN AND THE BUSINESS OF MALNUTRITION

GAIN obtained observer status at CODEX Alimentarius in order to influence global food standards and create opportunities for the commercial promotion of fortified foods for infants and young children, mainly through promotional claims. In January 2014 GAIN achieved the status of an NGO in Official Relations with WHO by strategically folding its Business Alliance into the SUN Business Network (SBN). The previous year Member States had refused GAIN's application because of concerns about "the nature and extent of the Alliance's links with the global food industry" and reports of its undermining of WHA Resolutions "including infant feeding and marketing of complementary foods." IBFAN had provided information about GAIN's unsuccessful lobbying in 2012 to weaken the Kenyan law, which bans the promotion of complementary foods.

CONCLUSION:

In all these public-private partnerships and multi-stakeholder platforms adequate safeguards to protect public health and nutrition policy setting from corporate influence are missing – so they all are high risk.

REFERENCES

- 1 <http://scalingupnutrition.org/>, accessed on 6th September 2014
- http://scalingupnutrition.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/SUN_MPTF_CALL_FOR_PROPOSAL_guidelines_14_Oct_2013.pdf
- COCHRANE REVIEWS:<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/14651858.CD009000.pub2/abstract> <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/14651858.CD009584.pub2/abstract>
- IBFAN Statement Cochrane Review on Commercial Ready-to-use Therapeutic Foods* <http://ibfan.org/ips/IBFAN-calls-for-a-review-of-UN-September-2013.pdf>
- Discussion paper on a standard for Ready to Use Foods (RUFs) UNICEF 2014 http://scalingupnutrition.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/SUN_Framework.pdf, accessed 6th September 2014
- <http://www.gainhealth.org/press-releases/business-scales-action-combat-global-malnutrition>, accessed 11th September 2014
- <http://sunbusinessnetwork.org/business-commitment/mars-inc/>, <http://sunbusinessnetwork.org/business-commitment/pepsico-inc/>, <http://sunbusinessnetwork.org/business-commitment/unilever/>, <http://sunbusinessnetwork.org/business-commitment/ajinomoto/> accessed 6th Sept. 2014; http://www.gainhealth.org/sites/s1.gainnutrition.addison.com/files/BPNR_Factsheet_Final.pdf
- Unilever announces second year achievements of the Unilever Sustainable Living Plan strategy* <http://www.unilever.co.id/media-centre/pressreleases/2013/Sustainability-Based-Strategy-Helps-to-Drive-Business-Growth.aspx>
- <http://www.codexalimentarius.org/members-observers/observers/detail/en/c/14797/>, accessed 6th September 2014
- http://apps.who.int/gb/ebwha/pdf_files/EB132/B132_R9-en.pdf
- <http://info.babymilkaction.org/132ndEB2013>