



COP27: Can lessons be learned and UPF trade controlled?



Extinction Rebellion mass 'nurse-in' . Westminster, London October 2019 Photo: Helena Smith

As world leaders meet in Sharm El-Sheikh, Egypt for the 27th United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP 27), IBFAN is calling for restrictions on the global production and trade of ultra-processed (UPFs) plastic-wrapped and additive-laden products. While many nutrition campaigns have focused on excess sugar, salt and fat, less attention has been paid to the industrial food processing that extends product life for global trade, denatures food ingredients and has had a disastrous impact on human health and the environment. The latest analysis shows that UPF consumption is a significant cause of premature death in Brazil.(1)

IBFAN is especially concerned about the production and trade of the unnecessary UPFs for babies – many sweetened and flavoured – that are aggressively and misleadingly promoted by corporations such as Nestlé, Danone, Reckitt, Abbott and Mead Johnson.(2) These products include formulas and drinks that are undermining healthy, bio-diverse family foods, fuelling the obesity epidemic and undermining breastfeeding – the nutritional, immunological health protective norm that is a lifeline for many children. While it is a fundamental right of all mothers to decide how

to feed their children, in order to exercise those rights there needs to be legal protection from predatory marketing, supportive hospital practices and adequate maternity protection. There should also be access to products that are not harmful. Breastfeeding is the most environmentally friendly way to feed an infant resulting in zero waste, minimal greenhouse gases, and negligible water footprint. Higher ambient temperatures caused by global warming exacerbate food-borne diseases, leaving children most at risk of severe illness.(3).

Corporations profit from the climate crisis

The climate crisis brings a more precarious and insecure life, especially for people in the global south, those living in poverty, with disabilities, the elderly and the very young. For the baby food industry – it's just a business opportunity to be seized. This industry is directly and indirectly complicit in the climate emergency through the promotion of food systems that undermine biodiversity and traditional food cultures, resulting in deforestation, mono-cropping, land and sea-grabbing and the promotion of a host of risky technologies. (3)

The problem with global trade

While all governments have a sovereign right and duty to adopt effective laws to protect citizens, the agri-food industry and exporting nations lobby for legal loopholes that allow harmful marketing to flourish. Global trading standards for foods take many years to complete and are set at the UN Codex Alimentarius Commission, a body with weak conflict of interest safeguards that pays scant attention to environmental or animal welfare considerations. All too often harmful compromises are made because Codex decisions are based on political or commercial expedience rather than on relevant, convincing and credible evidence. Between 1995 and 2019, Codex standards were used 245 times as a challenge to national marketing, labelling or safety testing regulations on commercial milk formulas. (4).

Poorly-resourced countries – where children stand to suffer the most – are left to tackle these cross-border marketing problems alone. The exporting nations and corporations that profit from the sales, take no responsibility and are never held financially responsible for the harm they cause. All the ‘costs’ to human health and the environment are externalized to governments, families and our planet.

Covid-19 was ‘Mother nature’s lesson for humanity’ – why so much amnesia?

Today’s complicated global scenario takes place less than two years after the decrease in pollution, the return of clean air and the resurgence of wildlife that unexpectedly occurred due to restrictions on mobility and industrial production to contain the COVID-19 pandemic. This flexibility and regenerative capacity still exists in many ecosystems when disturbance is significantly reduced.

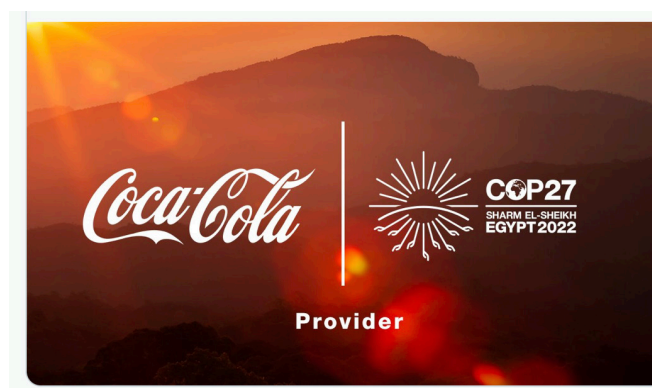
This should have been one of the main lessons of the pandemic. However, while vaccines brought relief against the coronavirus the rush to resume consumption and pursue financial profit brought amnesia. New wars, fires, drought, floods, and forced displacement are destroying food systems and famine is being normalised. Will governments’ ability and willingness to implement their COP26 commitments be postponed yet again?

Infant and young child feeding in emergencies: A third of the victims of war are children and almost a million are born each year as refugees. For them, hunger and communicable diseases defy all international goals and targets. IBFAN groups are working in countries such as Pakistan that are hit

by climate-related flooding where poor sanitation, malnutrition and disease outbreaks are hitting children under five the hardest. Babies are at great risk of water-related diseases, with diarrhoeal disease the second biggest killer of under-fives. Commercial donations of baby feeding products exacerbate these problems and undermine the efforts to protect breastfeeding. (5)

Action to safeguard policy making and stop greenwashing

IBFAN works alongside civil society organisations and networks who are objecting to corporations such as Coca Cola being a sponsor of the conference and holding health and planet harming corporations accountable for the damage they cause.



The risks of Multi-stakeholderism

The climate emergency is even more complex than health, but the same principles should apply and policy making must be protected from undue commercial influence. Through the promotion of ‘multi-stakeholder’ partnerships (6) corporations and their front groups have diverted attention from the need for strong regulation and truly independent monitoring, fuelling unfounded greenwashing claims.(7)

IBFAN is calling on the leaders present at COP27 to restrict the trade ultra-processed (UPFs) products and ensure that trade rules take health and environmental concerns properly into account.

NOTES:

(1) Risks of Ultra-Processed Foods (UPFs):

- UPFs form 50% of Britons' calorie intake
- Nelson et al [*Premature Deaths Attributable to the Consumption of Ultraprocessed Foods in Brazil*](#). American Journal of Preventive Medicine 10.1016/j.amepre.2022.08.013 2022 <https://www.eurekalert.org/news-releases/970082>. Review article
- Angel et al. *Ultraprocessed Foods and Public Health: A Need for Education*. Mayo Clinic Proceedings, Volume 94, Issue 11, November 2019, Pages 2156-2157
- Wang et al. *Trends in Consumption of Ultraprocessed Foods Among US Youths Aged 2-19 Years, 1999-2018*. JAMA. 2021;326(6):519-530. doi:10.1001/jama.2021.10238
- Neri et al. *Ultraprocessed food consumption and dietary nutrient profiles associated with obesity: A multicountry study of children and adolescents*. Obes Rev 2022 Jan;23 Suppl 1:e13387.doi10.1111/obr.13387. Epub 2021 Dec 9.
- *The increased proliferation, consumption and global trade in ultra-processed products baby feeding products* (Euromonitor 2019).
- FAO. *Ultra-processed foods, diet quality, and health using the NOVA classification system* Monteiro et al.

(2) **Evidence of harmful marketing of baby feeding products.**

Reports from WHO, IBFAN and others of systematic and continuing violations of the *International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes and the 19 Resolutions passed by the World Health Assembly* – the world's highest health policy-setting body. 144 countries have adopted legal measures to implement at least some of the provisions in the International Code, but as a result of industry lobbying many are very weak. *Interference in public health policy: examples of how the baby food industry uses tobacco industry tactics*. World Health Nutrition. This paper shows how the baby food industry uses the six tobacco industry tactics to undermine political will to adopt strong legislation: (1) maneuvering to hijack the political and legislative process; (2) exaggerating economic importance of the industry; (3) manipulating public opinion to gain appearance of respectability; (4) fabricating support through front groups; (5) discrediting proven science; and (6) intimidating governments with litigation

(3) Infant feeding and Climate: *IBFAN's Q&A on the Abbott contamination scandal Calls to curb infant formula's carbon footprint*, December 4, 2019, *IBFAN Health and Environment Carbon-Footprints-Due-to-Milk-Formula.pdf Green-Feeding-RC-Carbon-Footprint-10-Asian-Countries.pdf Commentary on Carbon Footprint of Milk* IBFAN's Greenfeeding papers. *Global Heating: an urgent call for action* Lancet| Vol400, ISSUE 10363, P1557, Nov 05, 2022

(4) Codex: *Weak global trading standards and the climate crisis – Why Codex must step up* Blog in preparation for the Codex meetings in November and March to adopt new standards for baby foods. Codex has failed to address Cross Promotion, a misleading labelling practice that leads to newborn babies being fed inappropriate products. Click here for more about Cross Promotion in Brazil. Russ K, Baker P, Byrd M, et al. *What you don't know about the Codex can hurt you: how trade policy trumps global health governance in infant and young child nutrition*. International Journal of Health Policy and Management 2021; 10(12): 983-97. Baker et al. *Exporting countries put trade before the health of the planet and children*(November 2019). *Globalization and Health* (2021) 17:58. *Advocacy at Work During the Codex Committee on Food Labelling Meeting* (IBFAN Codex Press releases from 2006)

Cross-cutting issues. Codex will vote in November on whether to set Maximum Residue Levels (MRLs) for Zilpaterol, a drug, made by Merck, that is used to boost growth in cattle. Zilpaterol is currently banned in the UK, EU and Russia who oppose Codex' work on this for many reasons. Routine use of drugs for commercial reasons might exacerbate Anti Microbial Resistance. *WHO's One Health Approach, antimicrobials and AMR*.

(5) Emergencies: The worst floods in Pakistan's history put a third of the country under water and killed 1,717 people. IBFAN Pakistan is working with the Government and UNICEF to provide health, nutrition and breastfeeding counselling, and education on avoiding ultra-processed products and eating healthy local foods. Donations of infant formula and other powdered milk products during emergencies are often in violation of Pakistan's Breastfeeding Protection Laws, the Global IYCF Strategy and the IFE Operational Guidance for emergency Relief Staff The Infant Feeding in Emergencies (IFE) Core Group is a global collaboration of agencies and individuals that formed in 1999 to address policy guidance and training resource gaps hampering programming on infant and young child feeding support in emergencies.

The 2020 Lancet/UNICEF/WHO Commission report concluded: "... today's children face an uncertain future. Climate change, ecological degradation, migrating populations, conflict, pervasive inequalities, and predatory commercial practices threaten the health and future of children in every country."

(6) Multi-stakeholderism *Who has the power in a Multistakeholder world?*(Powerpoint presentation) Video introduction to the UN-WEF deal based on an interview with Harris Gleckman on Open Democracy

Compilation of Conflict of Interest articles by Constance Ching.

(7) Sustainability Labelling. To prevent greenwashing, labelling schemes should focus on warnings rather than claims and be mandatory (government controlled) with independent monitoring and strong accountability safeguards. See IBFAN's comment on Sustainability labelling.

The online version of this statement with links is [HERE](#)

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**Dr Marcos Arana, IBFAN Mexico,
calls for more empathy**

“The most vulnerable members of our society are the ones hardest hit by pandemics and emergencies: people in the global south, those living in poverty or with disabilities, the elderly and the very young. Adversity strikes those who have the least and pollute the least, as well as those who have inhabited this planet for the shortest time.

The beginning of human life is when breastfeeding stands out as the most reliable and sustainable food system, mitigating and adapting to the effects of climate change. Breastfeeding is also one of the main axes for the development of empathy, which is the antidote to violence. Empathy is also essential for all of us to develop new ways of inhabiting this planet.”

Dr. Julie Smith, Hon Ass Prof, Australian Centre for Economic Research on Health.

“The most alarming finding in our research is a very large proportion of greenhouse gas emission impact is associated with the so-called growing up milks or toddler formula ... In China, nearly half of the sales of milk formula is toddler formula. For the UK alone, carbon emission savings gained by supporting mothers to breastfeed would equate to taking between 50,000 and 77,500 cars off the road each year”.

International Baby Food Action Network (IBFAN) is a worldwide network of more than 148 public interest groups in over 108 countries. Members are diverse and include health worker, parent, consumer and development organisations. Social justice, human rights and environmental protection underscore all our work.

IBFAN members help governments bring in legislation to support and protect families and health workers. Our work on breastfeeding and young child feeding is just one element in the global action to ensure an environment in which children can survive and reach the highest attainable standard of health.

IBFAN does not seek or accept financial or other supports from manufacturers or distributors (or their trusts or foundations) of infant and young child feeding and related products. IBFAN is also cautious about funding from any for-profit entities since this can lead to loss of reputation and raise questions about IBFAN's integrity.



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