

**World Health Assembly Resolution tackles  
conflicts of interest**

**Press release 26 May 2012**

Health campaigners including the [International Baby Food Action Network](#) are welcoming a new [resolution](#) passed at the [65th World Health Assembly](#) which calls on governments to strengthen controls on the marketing of breastmilk substitutes and to establish '*adequate mechanisms*' to deal with conflicts of interest.

The Resolution will be especially important in relation to the new partnerships and "multi-stakeholder" arrangements that are springing up to tackle poor nutrition - many of which are pushing fortified processed baby foods and fuelling the multi-billion 'business of malnutrition.'

Proposed by **Canada, UK, Swaziland and Mexico**, the Resolution ushered in WHO's [Comprehensive Implementation Plan on Maternal, infant and young child nutrition](#), which emphasises the importance of breastfeeding and sound infant and young child nutrition in child survival.

An initial strong Resolution proposed by **Swaziland** and **Uganda** to protect infant health, prompted several days of behind the scenes wrangling, where **Canada** and the **US** called for the deletion of everything except a single line adopting the *Implementation Plan*. One particular sticking point was Paragraph 3.3. which requests the Director General of WHO "to develop risk assessment, disclosure and management tools to safeguard against possible conflicts of interest in policy development and implementation of nutrition programmes consistent with WHO's overall policy and practice." The US wanted this tied down to the '*country level*.' However, after **Norway** stepped in, with support from **Swaziland** and other countries, saying that Conflicts of Interest need to be addressed at *all* levels, the reference to 'country Level' was removed.

During the Assembly debates several Member States expressed concerns about the plan's over-emphasis on fortified processed foods and supplements, which may not be necessary and can also undermine support for and attention to breastfeeding and nutritious, affordable, culturally appropriate and sustainable local foods. Indeed, instead of improving child health, many feared that the market-led approaches to "prevent" malnutrition championed by public-private-partnerships, could actually worsen the situation and increase further the double burden of malnutrition - both under and over nutrition. In response to the particular concerns of **Finland** regarding the overemphasis on fortified supplements and other issues, the tables contained in the Action Plan were removed.

The **Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition** (GAIN), which works with over 600 companies, including **Danone** (the world's second largest baby food company and violator of the World Health Assembly baby food marketing requirements), **PepsiCo**, **Mars** and **Kraft**, is one such body that has been lobbying to use health and nutrition claims to promote baby foods. Another initiative called, **Scaling Up Nutrition** (SUN) was wholeheartedly supported in the speech by the **International Special Dietary Industries** (ISDI). SUN has been encouraging developing countries to partner with companies to address malnutrition. However, it has yet to formulate its own conflict of interest safeguards.

In calling for Conflict of Interest safeguards at all levels and mandating WHO *"to provide clarification and guidance on the inappropriate promotion of foods for infants and young children"* the Resolution could do much to clean up these initiatives and ensure that they work truly in the interests of child health.

Welcoming the Resolution, Dr Francesco Branca, Director of WHO Nutrition, stressed the importance of having an agreement on a common vision on targets which can be measured, and where an accountability framework can be developed.

[The text of Resolution \(WHA63.xxxx\) is below or CLICK Here](#) for pdf with some of the amendments highlighted.

The final version will appear on the WHO website soon.

## **Maternal, infant and young child nutrition**

### **Draft resolution proposed by the delegations of Canada, Mexico, Swaziland and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland**

The Sixty-fifth World Health Assembly,

PP1 Having considered the report on maternal, infant and young child nutrition: draft comprehensive implementation plan, 1

1. ENDORSES the comprehensive implementation on maternal, infant and young child nutrition;

2. URGES Member states to put into practice, as appropriate, the comprehensive implementation plan on maternal, infant and young child nutrition, including:

- developing or, where necessary, strengthening nutrition policies so that they comprehensively address the double burden of malnutrition and include nutrition actions in overall country health and development policy, and establishing effective intersectoral governance mechanisms in order to expand the implementation of nutrition actions with particular emphasis on the framework of the global strategy on infant and young child feeding;
- developing or where necessary strengthening legislative, regulatory and/or other effective measures to control the marketing of breast-milk substitutes;
- establishing a dialogue with relevant national and international parties and forming alliances and partnerships to expand nutrition actions with the establishment of adequate mechanisms to safeguard against potential conflicts of interest;
- implementing a comprehensive approach to capacity building, including workforce development.

3. REQUESTS the Director-General:

1. to provide clarification and guidance on the inappropriate promotion of foods for infants and young children as mentioned in resolution WHA63.23, taking into consideration ongoing work of the Codex Alimentarius;

2. to support Member States to monitor and evaluate policies and programmes, including those of the global strategy for infant and young child feeding, with the latest evidence on nutrition;
3. to develop risk assessment, disclosure and management tools to safeguard against possible conflicts of interest in policy development and implementation of nutrition programmes consistent with WHO's overall policy and practice;
4. to report to the 67th World Health Assembly through the Executive Board on progress in the implementation of the code of marketing breastmilk substitutes and related WHA resolutions.

### **IBFAN/Consumers International**

[Statement](#) on WHO Reform read by Ina Verzivoli

- IBFAN/Consumers International [Statement](#) on Infant and Young Child Nutrition read by **Dr Arun Gupta**

More Information

[RCI Final WHO Reform 2012.pdf](#)