

Forum: World Health Organization (WHO)

Issue # 1: Measures to address the negative effects of processed foods on the health of citizens

Student Officer: Felipe da Paixao

Position: Chair of WHO

Introduction

During the past 40 to 50 years, the fast-food industry has slithered its way into pop culture, and along the way, they have amassed a market size of \$647.7 billion. To the dismay of many, they don't seem to be stopping any time soon with a predicted market size of \$931 billion by 2027. Nevertheless, the world cannot turn a blind eye to the negative effects the food consumed at fast-food establishments has on our health. Fast food is considered ultra-processed food, which often includes unhealthy amounts of sugar, sodium, and fat. These ingredients make processed foods taste better, but consuming too much of them can be detrimental to the human body. It can lead to problems such as obesity, type 2 diabetes, elevated levels of blood pressure, blood sugar, and cholesterol, stroke, heart disease, non-alcoholic fatty liver disease, and cancer. Although there has been little diplomatic involvement over the past years, ultra-processed foods are becoming a major obstacle in the health of countless individuals around the globe, therefore it must be properly addressed to make sure that humans know how to make educated decisions in regards to their diets and health.

Definition of Key Terms

Fast-food industry

"The Fast Food industry consists and accounts for prepared food usually from a restaurant, store, food truck, or street vendor served quickly and affordably to consumers in a take-out, disposable container. Most fast-food companies work with low preparation time and preheated or precooked ingredients to reduce transaction time and cost for each purchase." [marketshare.com](https://www.marketshare.com)

Processed & Ultra-Processed foods

It might not seem like it but there is a big difference between processed foods and ultra-processed foods. Not all processed foods are bad. Milk is an important source of calcium and frozen fruits, and vegetables are considered processed foods simply because they are frozen to last longer, but they maintain their health benefits. On the other hand, all ultra-processed foods are unhealthy for human consumption. According to [NOVA](#) (a food classification system), "snacks, drinks, ready meals, and many other products created mostly or entirely from substances extracted from foods or derived from food constituents with little if any intact food." These include soft drinks, chips, chocolate, candy, ice cream, sweetened breakfast cereals, packaged soups, chicken nuggets, hotdogs, fries, and more.

Dietary Guidelines

A document that provides citizens of a certain country with evidence-based recommendations on foods and beverages. An example of a dietary guideline would be the American dietary guidelines. The aim of the recommendations made in a dietary guideline is to promote health and prevent chronic disease. The five major points addressed in a dietary guideline are, "1) follow a healthy

eating pattern across the lifespan, 2) focus on variety, nutrient density, and amount, 3) limit calories from added sugars and saturated fats and reduce sodium intake, 4) shift to healthier food and beverage choices, and 5) support healthy eating patterns for all (HHS & USDA)." ([nursingcenter.com](https://www.nursingcenter.com))

NCDs

According to the Pan American Health Organization, "The term NCDs refers to a group of conditions that are not mainly caused by an acute infection, result in long-term health consequences and often create a need for long-term treatment and care. These conditions include cancers, cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and chronic lung illnesses."

General Overview

Foreign companies affect the local economy and community

"In addition to tailoring their menu to cater to local consumer tastes, and adjusting their portion size and even their name to meet local cultural norms, U.S. companies often support local communities and charitable organizations to build their brand and establish goodwill in a market. Coca-Cola has engaged in various local projects to demonstrate a commitment to international markets. In Egypt, Coca-Cola has constructed 650 clean water installations to provide potable water to local areas. The company also operates a program called Ramadan Meals for Children that provides meals for children during the season of Ramadan; the program has been so successful that it is now offered throughout the Middle East. Coca-Cola is also the sponsor of Support My School in India, a program that helps to renovate and improve school facilities across the country." ([thebalancesmb.com](https://www.thebalancesmb.com))

Importance of eating healthy

It's important to eat healthy because it prevents the body from having chronic (long-term) diseases (such as cancer, diabetes, and heart disease), and decreases your risk of obesity. It is important to eat a balanced diet that includes foods from animal sources, vegetables, fruit, legumes, and whole grains.

Effects of ultra-processed foods on the human body

“Research links ultra-processed foods to a number of health problems. People who eat more of the stuff are more likely to be obese and have diabetes, heart disease, and vascular disease (that includes stroke), too. One recent study even tied convenience foods to cancer risk.” (webmd.com)

Major Parties Involved and Their Views

United States

As one of the most active and powerful countries in the world, the United States of America is also one of the countries that consume the most amount of fast food in the entire world.

Mexico

As one of the few countries taking action against the fast-food industry, Mexico has implemented taxes that will increase the price of junk food by 8% and a surcharge on the sale of carbonated drinks. According to a study by the National Institute of Public Health in Mexico and UNC-Chapel Hill, the consumption of these items has decreased 5% in the middle and lower classes.

Norway

As the leader in the charge against the fast-food industry, they have implemented taxes for sugary drinks, fast food, and they have restricted the

availability of fast food for children. Most notably, in 2013, the government and the fast-food industry agreed to a self-regulated ban on the marketing of unhealthy fast food and drinks to children under the age of 16.

UN involvement, Relevant Resolutions, Treaties, and Events

In recent years, several departments inside the UN have written reports on the effects of ultra-processed foods. These reports have found that ultra-processed foods are made with chemicals that promote habit-forming consumption addiction, therefore, overconsumption. The marketing and promotion of these products are major components of promoting obesity, especially for vulnerable groups such as children. The report found that the diet “predominates in low quality, ultra-processed foods can contribute to both obesity and stunting and at the same time, produce harmful effects for the environment through its influence on the food system.” (Barquera et al, 2019). In 2019, a meeting was set in Washington DC between the Pan American Health Organization and the World Health Organization (Regional Office for the Americas) to discuss Ultra-Processed foods and drinks products in Latin America. A 72-page document was written on the issue; it goes over sales, sources, nutritional profiles, and policy implications of ultra-processed foods in Latin America. Although there have been reports written on the effects of ultra-processed foods by UN committees, departments within the UN, or organizations working alongside the UN, there have been no treaty, amendment, agreement, or resolution written on the topic by the World Health Organization (WHO).

Past action

The rising rate of obesity has been linked with the increasing consumption of ultra-processed foods. In the Americas, this has been a widely discussed issue by the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO). Brazil adopted food guides that categorized foods and make recommendations based on the guidelines. It was

the first country to do so. The Brazilian Ministry of Education adopted these methods to reduce the consumption of ultra-processed foods and as a preventative method against obesity. According to a Cambridge University Press Article (with the objective to assess the efforts of the Brazilian legislature to regulate the ultra-processed food industry practices), "Although many bills have been introduced, no regulation of ultra-processed food industry practices has been enacted by the Brazilian legislature by 2020. It is likely that no positive impact on population nutrition in Brazil will be achieved by the end of the United Nation's Decade of Action on Nutrition, in 2025 – especially regarding those goals set by the Brazilian government which was supposed to have been achieved by 2019."(Mariath and Martins, August 2020). The Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) has previously established a plan of action to prevent obesity in children and adolescents. The recommendations made by PAHO to encourage the promotion of healthier eating included taxes on sugary drinks and other ultra-processed foods to reduce their affordability, bans on marketing ultra-processed foods and drinks that increase the burden of NCDs, implementing front-of-package labeling to ensure that consumers can easily identify products not recommended as part of a healthy diet, and reshaping food settings, including in schools, workplaces, prisons, universities, institutional facilities, so that procurement focuses on fresh, local, minimally-processed foods that promote public health, the environment, and equitable socio-economic growth. These recommendations were agreed upon by all governments of the Americas and the timeline was set from 2014-2019. In 2016, 1.9 million people died from diet-related conditions such as high blood pressure, high blood glucose, and obesity. These complications can lead to cardiovascular problems such as diabetes and specific cancers. The population of Mexico, Chile, and Ecuador is responsible for one-third of the population of the region, and in these countries, the annual health care costs due to obesity have reached \$11.6

billion. This is why it's so important to take care of the population's eating habits and limit their intake of ultra-processed foods.

Possible Solutions

As previously mentioned, the PAHO suggested solutions such as taxing ultra-processed foods and drinks, bans on specific marketing strategies, labeling ultra-processed foods as not part of a healthy diet, etc. Other Measures to further address this topic include but are not limited to implementing health and nutritional classes as required credits for graduation (high-school), negotiating with the fast-food industry about the addition of artificial flavorings and additives, investing in sustainable agriculture, support farming with fewer pesticides and agro toxics, invest in public campaigns to incentivize physical activity, create recurring events to promote physical activity and open outdoor gyms for the impoverished communities.

Sustainable Development Goal (SDG)

Goal N°3: Good health and Well-being - Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages.

Goal N°12: Responsible Consumption and Production - Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns

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