



Why we need a Global Convention to protect and promote healthy diets

The world is facing a major health crisis.

Poor diets contribute to more than 11 million deaths annually and are now the number one global risk factor for death. Premature illness and disability from diet-related diseases impoverishes families, reduces productivity and threatens to bankrupt health systems. The global economic impact from obesity alone is roughly US\$2 trillion, or 2.8 percent of global GDP, roughly equivalent to the global impact from smoking or armed violence, war, and terrorism.

This isn't just a rich country problem. Diet related diseases such as cancer, cardiovascular disease and diabetes are rising far faster in developing economies and resulted in more than eight million people dying before their sixtieth birthdays in low and middle-income countries in 2013 alone. We need a global transformation in the way people eat. Consumers don't just need the right to food; they need the right to healthy food.

What needs to be done?

Healthy food supplies are increasingly undermined by the availability, accessibility and affordability of processed food products high in fat, sugar and salt. These products are also heavily promoted and marketed, undermining the market for more nutritious and local foods. Helping consumers to choose healthier diets requires changing the food environments in which people live.

There is strong consensus about the types of policies that are required to help consumers choose healthier diets. Reformulation of unhealthy processed food products to reduce salt, sugar and fat; restrictions on the marketing of unhealthy food to children; better nutrition labelling; and provision of better food in schools, hospitals and other public institutions are some of the measures that can help improve our diets. Some countries have implemented some policies, but progress is piecemeal. No country has successfully introduced the measures needed to achieve significant reductions in overweight and obesity.

How a Global Convention will help.

CI is calling for a Global Convention to Protect and Promote Healthy Diets, using the same kind of mechanism as the Framework Convention for Tobacco Control. It would involve World Health Organization (WHO) Member States signing a legal agreement. Each country would commit to a framework of policies that would define healthy diets and healthy food and set out measures for the promotion and protection of healthy diets.

A Global Convention would mean an internationally agreed approach to this health crisis. It would create a policy framework for governments and ministries, and expectations and norms that are in line with public health goals; and it would strengthen the position of governments and ministries who often face strong opposition from the food and advertising industry.

In May 2014 we published [an example](#) of what such a convention might look like.

In November 2014 over 330 experts and civil society organisations around the world signed an [open letter](#) to the heads of WHO and Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) ahead of the Second International Conference on Nutrition calling for a Global Convention.

Time to act

We call on the member states of the WHO to:

1. Mandate the WHO to develop a framework convention for the protection and promotion of healthy diets, through a process protected from conflicts of interest;
2. Implement national legislation which puts into practice and goes beyond the global commitments assumed in the Global Action Plan for NCDs to help consumers to make healthier choices and binds food suppliers to conform to standards based on national food-based dietary guidelines in their promotion and marketing of food products;

For more information

More information is available on the CI [website](#).

About Consumers International

Established in 1960, CI is the world federation of consumer rights groups. Our goal is to ensure that consumer rights can never be ignored. With over 250 Member organisations spanning 120 countries, we serve as the only independent and authoritative global voice for consumer rights. We are a registered UK charity.