

## The formation of a Food Advertising Regulation Code is a decisive step in the fight against undernourishment and child obesity

Since they are developing individuals and do not yet have the ability to think critically, children need to rely on a legal and effective protection against advertising abuse. In this sense, the elaboration of a Food Advertising Regulation Code is urgent and necessary, as exemplified by the code developed by Consumers International Organization\*. Such instrument must be based on solid arguments and supported by a trustworthy institution. Being aware of that, through Child and Consumption Project (Projeto Criança e Consumo), Instituto Alana, joining forces with other partners and citizens committed to children's welfare, comes before WHO to request the elaboration of this code. By protecting children from undernourishment and obesity, helping in the formation of capable citizens and unburdening public coffers, this initiative may ensure a healthy development to the country's economy as well.

\*[http://www.consumersinternational.org/shared\\_asp\\_files/GFSR.asp?NodeID=97478](http://www.consumersinternational.org/shared_asp_files/GFSR.asp?NodeID=97478)

### Child and Consumption Project - Instituto Alana

The mission of Instituto Alana, through Child and Consumption Project, is to develop society's critical awareness of the harmful effects of the market communication aimed at children and its relation to consumption.

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## Junk food + advertising aimed at children + flawed legislation This formula is undernourishing Brazilian children



**15% or 5,957,859  
Brazilian children are  
already obese, and  
30% are overweight**

Something is wrong when poverty in the country decreases and childhood malnourishment increases. And even more wrong when 30% of Brazilian children are overweight and 15% are already obese. Malnourishment in Brazil has only changed its generating fact. Upon detecting new market niches within the less favored population, advertising acts fast, inducing children to see the usual and excessive consumption of industrialized food as a better way of life. Ensnared by the seductive messages, they are migrating from a situation of hunger to an ever increasing situation of overweight and obesity. To worsen this situation, the regulation of advertising aimed at children has not been working out. Beaten by the economic interests, actions by the Public Power that had been taking shape have lost strength, making the path to the prohibition of junk food advertising aimed at children even longer and harder. That is why it is extremely necessary for WHO to take a determinate and brave stand against this matter, which is also a matter of public health.

## The weight of harassment of food advertising aimed at children expressed in numbers

### Childhood overweight is closely related to commercial bombardment

A study conducted by the University of São Paulo in 2007 indicated that: 82% of the TV commercials suggested the immediate consumption of the food; 78% showed the characters ingesting it and 24% of the students exposed to such messages were overweight or obese. The same study further revealed that watching TV for over 2 hours a day is linked to the increase of the BMI (Body Mass Index) among boys.

### Children do not understand the persuasive nature of the messages

According to a report (2004) of the American Psychological Association, it is only after they are 12 years old that they can completely discern content from entertainment and understand that the message is intended to sell them something. The 2008 IBOPE<sup>1</sup> report reveals that the average time of exposure to TV of Brazilian children aged 4 to 11 is 4h54m, an alarming data if compared to the 4h26m that children dedicate to school in Brazil (FGV<sup>2</sup>, 2009). Add to that the fact that over 70% of the advertising campaigns (MS<sup>3</sup>, June/2008) are of unhealthy food and beverages.

### Treats take the place of healthy food more and more

Only 25.2% of the children aged between 2 and 5 and 38.3% of the children aged between 5 and 10 eat fruit, vegetables and greens (MS, 2009). To worsen the situation, 26.6% declared that they eat candy, cookies and other sweets 5 to 7 times a week. A research by Datafolha<sup>4</sup> (2010) shows that children aged 3 to 11 eat a few times a week: crackers (82%), soft drinks (70%) and chips (64%). At the same time, 75% of the parents agree that giving prizes and gifts has an influence on the choice of food for the little ones.

### The nutritional transition has become a passage from undernourishment to obesity

While on one side the lack of calories and protein of Brazilian children has decreased 72%, on the other side obesity in children and adolescents has increased. Researches show that today, 15% of Brazilian children – nearly 6 million – are already obese, 30% of them being overweight, showing that even the population living in slums is subject to eating disorders such as obesity and overweight due also to the commercial harassment.

<sup>1</sup> Brazilian Public Opinion and Statistics Institute - <sup>2</sup> Getúlio Vargas Foundation - <sup>3</sup> Ministry of Health - <sup>4</sup> Research Institute

## What shall we do to protect children from malnourishment and obesity

### Children's health comes before the food industry's interests

Several sectors of society and the public power itself in Brazil have worked to help elaborate a more restrictive legislation as regards unhealthy food and beverage advertising aimed at children. Due to the heavy pressure exerted by the economic interests of the food industries and by the advertising sector, important actions thought of by the Public Power in this sense ended up, however, being dismissed in favor of self-regulation promises made by the market. However, the Public Commitment of Self-Regulation and Responsible Advertising signed in Brazil has not been complied with, since several companies have not changed in any way their commercial practices and communication strategies aimed at children.

### A healthy economy must encompass the concept of alimentary safety

Alimentary safety concerns the fight against undernourishment as well as the control of the consumption of non-alcoholic food and beverages that are junk and unhealthy. It encompasses the right to regular and permanent access to good quality food based on healthy alimentary practices that respect cultural diversity and are socially, economically and environmentally sustainable (Food and Agriculture Organization).



The exclusive focus on profits weighs more than the true concern of the companies with the children's and the adolescents' health

### Seductive messages link the consumption of junk food to social rise

The vulnerability of the low income population is a feast for advertising, which broadens even more its arsenal of strategies to attract this public's investments. In case of industrialized food, when adding visual appeals, endorsement by characters, offers of gifts and emotional appeals to the communication, they induce children to form unhealthy eating habits. Therefore, a bag of chips of virtually no nutritious value, besides the fact that it is easier to transport and store, becomes more attractive and accessible than healthy food of similar price

