

RESPONSE TO COVID-19:

TECHNICAL NOTE ON DONATIONS AND FINANCIAL OR IN-KIND CONTRIBUTIONS FROM THE FOOD AND BEVERAGE COMPANIES

(March 30th, 2020)

Purpose of this note: UNICEF Country offices have requested guidance on whether to accept donations and financial or in-kind contributions from food and beverage companies in the context of COVID19. This document provides context, describes possible risks and sets out steps to mitigate these risksⁱ.

Target audience: UN regional and country offices, national governments and partner organizations

Contact person: PD-Nutrition (jjewell@unicef.org) and relevant Regional Nutrition Advisor

Context

Promotion and support for healthy diets that are nutritionally adequate is critical for children during emergencies, especially when opportunities for mobility and physical activity are limited. It is important for children to consume sufficient fruits and vegetables, wholegrains and protein sources. These types of food can be cooked from fresh, dried, tinned or frozen products. It is also essential that children continue to have access to safe drinking water, especially in areas that lack safely managed services. The emergency response should not undermine healthy dietary practices.

During the COVID19 emergency it is important to ensure that donations and in-kind or financial contributions are needs based rather than donor-driven, guarantee adequate nutritional quality of the diet, and minimize reputational risk to the organizations involved.

Recommendations

- **Donations of foods high in saturated fats, sugar and/or salt (hereafter “unhealthy foods”) should not be sought or accepted for targeted or blanket distributionⁱⁱ.** These foods do not meet [WHO recommendations](#) for a healthy diet and may undermine local food use and recommended dietary practices and contribute to an expansion of consumption of unhealthy foods.
- **Donations of breastmilk substitutes (BMS), complementary foods and feeding equipment, including bottles and teats, should not be sought or accepted for targeted or blanket distribution.** Donation of BMS by manufacturers has been shown to lead to increased use of substitutes and a reduction in breastfeeding. In circumstances where the use of BMS is required, they should be purchased, distributed and used according to strict criteriaⁱⁱⁱ. Read the [Operational Guidance for Infant Feeding in Emergencies](#) for more information.
- **Engagement with companies that produce ‘unhealthy foods’ should be avoided for financial or in-kind contributions. Cause-related marketing and joint communications should also be avoided.** This carries the risk that UNICEF and its partners will be perceived as endorsing a specific brand or products. Engagement with companies producing unhealthy food may damage UNICEF and its partners’ reputation with host governments, donor governments and communities. It may also appear to contradict ongoing work on prevention of overweight. In addition, companies that manufacture BMS should continue to be excluded from any in-kind donations, funding engagements or co-branded partnerships..

- **Continuity of critical services should be ensured, wherever possible, [including school feeding programmes](#). It is recommended that countries do not provide unhealthy foods as part of alternative arrangements for school feeding programmes and avoid partnerships with food and beverage companies that produce unhealthy food in maintaining these services.** Technical support to countries can help identify and inform government counterparts regarding the risks associated with accepting donated supplies of unhealthy foods in emergencies and/or partnering with companies that produce unhealthy foods. Organizations working on the emergency response at country level may consider joining forces to issue tailored guidance to countries on this issue, especially around ensuring the nutritional quality of foods provided under alternative approaches such as community-based provision, take-home rations, home delivery or vouchers.

Implementing the interim guidelines

As the lead agency for nutrition at country-level, heading emergency coordination, UNICEF must play a key role in ensuring adherence to these principles in its guidance to countries and support for resource mobilization.

- **UNICEF country offices should consult with their Regional Nutrition Advisor and Programme Division Nutrition Section (PD Nutrition) in relation to any potential engagement with food and beverage companies during the emergency response.** This is in addition to the routine consultation process for donations and in-kind or financial contributions that UNICEF country offices follow with the Division of Private Fundraising and Partnership and/or Supply Division.
- **Conditions under which donations and in-kind or financial contributions from food and beverage companies might exceptionally be considered by PD Nutrition include:**
 - The company does not produce/is not strongly associated with unhealthy foods. PD Nutrition will help making this judgement.
 - The company in-kind or financial contribution is for necessary food supplementation, equipment and materials (e.g. soap, detergents, face masks) or logistics, no alternative donors exist, and there is good evidence that *not* accepting the donation/in-kind contribution would do harm to children.
 - The company commits to only provide healthy food options in line with WHO Recommendations for a healthy diet, including diverse perishable and non-perishable items or meals consistent with the following elements:
 - ✓ Fresh, frozen or tinned fruits and vegetables, with no or minimal added salt or sugar
 - ✓ Tinned or dried pulses and legumes (e.g. beans, lentils)
 - ✓ Tinned oily fish (e.g. tuna, mackerel, salmon)
 - ✓ Unsalted nuts
 - ✓ Potatoes, bread, rice, pasta or other starchy carbohydrates; choosing wholegrain versions where possible
 - ✓ Unsaturated fats and oils (e.g. sunflower, soybean, canola and olive oils) are preferable to saturated fats (e.g. butter, palm and coconut oil, ghee or lard)
 - ✓ Limited amount of salt and high-sodium condiments or sauces (e.g. soy sauce, fish sauce and bouillon) and no salty snacks
 - ✓ Limited added sugar and no soft drinks or confectionery
 - ✓ Safe drinking water as the preferred beverage
 - The quality of non-food donations/in-kind contributions can be established and meet Supply Division criteria
 - The terms of agreement will be negotiated on a case-by-case basis, including agreement on:
 - ✓ Mitigating any risks relating to publicity; companies may be asked to minimize public communication
 - ✓ Avoiding co-branding of donations/in-kind contributions
 - ✓ Clarifying that there is no expectation from any side regarding future engagements

ENDNOTES

ⁱ This interim guidance has been developed specifically to respond to circumstances arising as part of the Covid19 emergency. It is intended to provide recommendations on new/arising situations and does not apply to engagements that may have existed prior to the Covid19 emergency.

ⁱⁱ Examples of unhealthy foods include, but are not limited to, candy, potato or corn chips, soft drinks such as soda or chocolate-flavoured milk, instant noodles, biscuits, cookies, wafers, cakes, pizza, pies or burgers and other fast foods.

ⁱⁱⁱ World Health Assembly Resolutions have clarified that in instances where children require BMS in the health care system, they should be purchased. WHA Resolution 47.5 stated that Governments must take measures “to ensure that there are no donations of free or subsidized supplies of breastmilk substitutes and other products covered by the International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes in any part of the health care system”; WHA Resolution 63.23 emphasized “the need to minimize the risks of artificial feeding, by ensuring that any required breast-milk substitutes are purchased, distributed and used according to strict criteria”.