



PRESS RELEASE

GAIN / Gates sponsored index whitewashes the most problematic food companies.

Access to Nutrition Index launched 12th March 2013

A new initiative launched today called **Access to Nutrition Index** - sponsored by the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN)¹ and the Gates Foundation has been slammed by critics as a whitewash. GAIN is a new type of public private entity which claims to work to tackle malnutrition - but Patti Rundall, Co-Chair of the International Baby Food Action Network,² says its work seems to focus on opening up markets for its 600 partner companies (including Danone, the world's second largest baby food company, Mars, Pepsi, and Coca Cola)

The report scores 25 of the world's largest food and beverage manufacturers on the basis of their written policies and statements, rather than on independent monitoring of their actions on the ground. Experts in comparing company statements with their actual practices suggest it is not surprising to find the report rewards those with the biggest PR budgets, with the highest scores going to Danone, Unilever, Nestle, PepsiCo, and Kraft. The value of this investment in PR can be seen from media coverage of the report which presents these as the "*best large firms worldwide when it comes to offering products that address both the problems of obesity and poor nutrition, says a new report, out today.*" (USA Today)

It is a truism that the companies most criticised for harmful practices tend to spend the most time on Corporate Social Responsibility reporting - and the [Corporate Critic](#)³ database cites Nestle as the company with far and away the highest number of critical stories reported over the last 5 years by civil society groups. Nestle had 647 reports, Unilever 362, Danone 127, Pepsi 179 and Coca Cola 219.

Aside from being criticised for promoting products high in fat salt and sugar that contribute to the global epidemic of chronic diseases (such as obesity, heart disease, cancer and diabetes) Nestlé and Danone are the worlds largest baby food companies who systematically violate the World Health Assembly Resolutions for baby foods and threaten child survival and health. This fact is acknowledged by the ATNI. (See [Save the Children](#) report for latest evidence of marketing malpractice.).

Critics suggest that one reason these companies do so well on this type of reporting is that the fulfilment of the ATNI criteria, for example on governance, corporate strategy, lobbying (engagement) of policy makers, can easily be achieved by describing company activities in an idealized, misleading way. For example, lobbying against UN recommendations can easily be hidden, especially if this takes place in social situations and behind closed doors. The aim of company lobbying is invariably to ensure that regulations about marketing, labeling and nutritional quality remain weak, rather than protective of public health.

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¹ GAIN's partner companies: www.gainhealth.org/partnerships/business-alliance/members

² The **International Baby Food Action Network** (IBFAN) is a global network of 273 groups in 168 countries. www.ibfan.org

³ **Corporate Critic** holds data going back to 1991, but all ratings and ethicoscores are based only on information published in the last five years. <http://www.corporatecritic.org/info/research.aspx#about>

Other ATNI criteria that play into the whitewashing strategies of food companies are the promotion of fortified foods, consumer 'education' about healthy diets and active lifestyle, and engagement with 'stakeholders' in public private partnerships. Company executives have taken the strategic decision to reposition themselves as trusted educators on nutrition, while continuing to produce and market junk foods. So ATNI is in effect rewarding companies who seek to change traditional food patterns and cultures through the promotion of highly processed foods and supplements.

One of the ongoing struggles the International Baby Food Action Network (IBFAN) has had with GAIN - a sponsor of the report - is its promotion of fortified foods for babies. Most recently at the 132nd WHO Executive Board (EB) Member States deferred GAIN's application for official relations status as an NGO, questioning its links with food corporations and its lobbying tactics.⁴

Following IBFAN's criticisms of the original protocol ATNI agreed to remove the module on breastmilk substitutes marketing - admitting that it could end up being a whitewash.

Patti Rundall, says: "*We all want companies to improve their practices and stop harming health. But this is not the way to encourage them to change. The ATNI report is a clever tactic that rewards companies for the wrong things. It diverts our attention away from what is so urgently needed - strong legislation with independent monitoring of what is actually happening on the ground. This is the only way we can stop harmful and misleading marketing and hold these companies to account.*"

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⁴ *The WHO Executive Board meeting in January 2013 decided to "... postpone consideration of the application for admission into official relations from The Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition..." and called for "information concerning the nature and extent of the Alliance's links with the global food industry, and the position of the Alliance with regard to its support and advocacy of WHO's nutrition policies, including infant feeding and marketing of complementary foods."*

EB Resolution 132/R9 http://apps.who.int/gb/ebwha/pdf_files/EB132/B132_R9-en.pdf
<http://info.babymilkaction.org/pressrelease/pressrelease31jan13>