Fat profits: health hangover as big brands woo world's poorest shoppers

Quest for new consumer markets brings fast food lifestyle problems to developing world, say activists

Felicity Lawrence

Nestlé is using a floating supermarket to take its products to remote communities in the Amazon. Unilever has a small army of door-to-door vendors selling to low-income villages in India and Africa. The South African SABMiller has developed cheaper beers in some African countries as part of a “price ladder” to premium lager brands, and, as a leading Coca-Cola distributor, is aiming to double fizzy drinks sales in South African townships.

As affluent western markets reach saturation point, global food and drink firms have been opening up new frontiers among people living on £2 a day. The world’s poor have become their vehicle for growth.

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The main obstacle to action was profit. “In a world of scarcity, the only reason people are not doing enough is the bottom line.” The interest in the health project, said the Nestlé spokesman, came from the company’s investment in a new social business unit, which “promotes social change.”

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