

# World Nutrition

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**Volume 3, Number 1, January 2012**

**Journal of the World Public Health Nutrition Association**

**Published monthly at [www.wphna.org](http://www.wphna.org)**

*The Association is an affiliated body of the International Union of Nutritional Sciences*

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*Commentary.*

## **World nutrition & World Nutrition**



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## Introduction

In this eighteenth edition of **World Nutrition** I tell the story of *WN* itself. This includes how we started in May 2010; what is our vision and mission; the style of *WN*; some of the commentaries and other contributions that have turned out to be outstanding; our impact (to be distinguished from Impact Factor); considerations we need to handle; and what we need for the future.

Much of the editorial in this issue also addresses the opportunities and challenges for *WN*, as well as for our publications as a whole. We have a bold title, for **World Nutrition** is all about world nutrition. So is World Nutrition *Rio2012*, our congress whose plans are now almost completed, in partnership with the Brazilian national public health organisation Abrasco. The Association, our members, and our colleagues in other organisations concerned with public health and with nutrition, have plenty of reasons to be pleased with *WN*. Readers may feel that I would say that, as *WN* editor. But *WN* is the product of much discussion and many contributors.

## How we started

### *The World Public Health Nutrition Association*

The World Public Health Nutrition Association itself came first, of course. The WPHNA, here called simply the Association, was founded as the outcome of a special meeting convened at the first World Congress on Public Health Nutrition in Barcelona, in September 2006. Many of us were inspired by the valedictory statement of José Maria Bengoa, often seen as the founding father of public health nutrition. Here he is, speaking at Barcelona.



Then in his 94th year, he said: ‘One can glimpse a great expansion in the horizons of the science of nutrition. The limited area that we had grown accustomed to is expanding. We are getting closer and closer, like a great magic wheel, to the ideas that the Greeks held about dietetics – as the dominion of life itself, both in the biological and social sense. It seems as if we are redefining nutrition as the beginning and end of life itself.’

Those present at the meeting agreed that an international organisation of public health nutritionists and allied professionals was needed, and that broadly it had – has – two related tasks. The first is as a professional body: to protect and increase the capacity and influence of the profession itself. The second is as a public interest organisation: to address issues that are, or should be, main concerns of those working in public health, nutrition, and allied professions.

It was agreed at and after the Barcelona meeting that the Association should be independent from all other bodies, while sympathetic with and supportive of organisations whose purpose is to protect and improve public health, nutrition and public goods generally. It was also agreed that transparency, which includes not making any arrangements that if revealed could reasonably be seen as troublesome, was crucial. One reason for these agreements, and indeed one reason to need the Association, is the close links that have been formed between professional bodies in the fields of nutrition and dietetics, and also health and medicine, and corporations whose profits depend on products that are or may be harmful to public health and public goods (1).

Barrie Margetts was nominated as president of the Association, and later became formally elected to this position. At the time of the Barcelona congress, he was in the process of retiring as founder-editor of *Public Health Nutrition* after nine years, being succeeded in this post by Association member Agneta Yngve. The Association became formally established, with a governing body, and an initial 100 members from 40 countries within all main continents. It became affiliated with the International Union of Nutritional Sciences, whose president at the time was Association member Ricardo Uauy, and whose current president is Association member Ibrahim Elmadfa.

### ***World Nutrition***

After Barcelona, Barrie and other colleagues, increasingly including myself, discussed how best to develop the Association’s publications. These had started in the form of a website giving information about the Association and its purposes (2). We agreed that what we wanted was a more substantial website, to be launched in two stages.

The first stage would be a regular home page. This we agreed should include general news, information about the Association, its members and its activities, and signed columns (3). The first such home page was launched on the occasion of the International Congress on Nutrition held in Bangkok in October 2009.

The second stage would be an on-line journal 'nested' within the website. We had considered a printed journal, and publishers were interested. But the arguments for an electronic journal were compelling. First, we live in an electronic age. Second, print journals concerned with nutrition – and other disciplines – are chiefly concerned with the reporting of the results of original research, which was not our intention – after all, this is what *Public Health Nutrition* does. Third, and particularly compelling, by its nature an electronic journal can be bang up to date with current contents. Fourth and related, print has physical restraints, whereas electronic contributions can be of any length. Fifth and also related, electronic journals can readily use full colour, photographs and other graphic material. Sixth – and this circles back to the first point above – electronic publications, in Word or pdf form, are readily accessible anywhere in the world.

Right from the start, one of the forces that motivated Association members has been the vision of public health nutrition becoming a more influential force for good in the world, and particularly in less resourced continents and countries. This argued for an electronic journal with – at least at first – unlimited access including to the whole website, and to pdfs of contributions.

### ***What's in a name***

There was much discussion about the title. Journals tend to have three different types of name. One denotes the topic – *Public Health Nutrition* being an example. Another states an affiliation – such as *Journal of the American Medical Association*. Another, more imaginative, indicates scope or attitude, such as *Gut* and *The Lancet*, or indeed *Science* and *Nature*. We liked this third approach, and in the midst of these discussions discovered that *World Nutrition*, as a journal title, was available. Discussion over!

The Association held a general meeting of members at the Bangkok congress. Here it was agreed that we should seek to launch *WN* at an appropriate time in 2010. It was also felt at meetings held in Bangkok that *WN* should not as a rule carry original papers, but editorials, commentaries, discussions, and responses.

But when to launch? The new home page, monthly as from March 2010, was – and is – a fairly substantial undertaking (3). But as with the title, our minds were made up by an unexpected event. Association member Michael Latham, the distinguished

professor of international nutrition at Cornell University, a physician with deep experience in East Africa, and a campaigner for breastfeeding and de-infestation of young children, offered us an advanced draft of a commentary questioning the policy of universal vitamin A supplementation. Could we fit this within the home page? No, it was clearly a contribution to be published in a journal. Should we recommend that Michael should approach an existing journal? No, this felt almost like abandoning plans for **World Nutrition**.

So having found a web manager in the North of Scotland, we decided to go ahead with the commentary and an accompanying editorial, and to make this the basis of our inaugural issue of *WN*. This is how we began. The rest was not history, because much correspondence was received and published, and later in 2010 we published a second commentary, by Keith West, Rolf Klemm and Al Sommer from the Bloomberg School of Public Health at Johns Hopkins University. This states the justification for current orthodox practice for universal vitamin A supplementation, as carried out by the relevant United Nations agencies.

## Our vision and mission

The other contribution to our first issue of *WN* was its manifesto. This is always available on our home page, within the *World Nutrition* 'menu' strip, and is linked here. Summarised, it makes four main points.

First, the nature of *WN*. As mentioned, we had agreed that there are plenty of journals of nutrition whose main purpose is descriptive, and to report original research. Specifically, we had no intention to compete with what we see as our sister journal *Public Health Nutrition*. 'Typically, nutrition journals are mainly concerned with information, and seek to describe their world as it is. *WN* respects facts, and at the same time it is mainly concerned with ideas... The need is for a journal whose contributors have scope to think and reflect on the significance of established and emerging experience and evidence'

Second, our vision, in the spirit of José Maria Bengoa, and in keeping with the Giessen Declaration, devised in 2005 and signed by a large number of Association members. 'The vision of *WN* is of nutrition as a social as well as a biological science, guided by ethical, ecological and evolutionary principles, and with economic, environmental and other dimensions... Nutrition does have a foundation in biochemistry, but is relevant and meaningful only inasmuch as it recognises and promotes family, community and population health, and other public goods. The

work of everybody concerned with the health, welfare and well-being of populations has social, cultural, economic, environmental and political contexts’

Third, the purpose of *WN*; also a purpose of the Association generally. ‘The perennial crisis of undernutrition illustrates the need to see the big picture. Food and nutrition security is fundamental to human health, welfare, potential, and progress. So are regional, national, and local independence and self-determination, and that of communities and families. In emergency and acute situations, adequate nutrition is often necessarily supplied, if not sustained, by external intervention. But populations whose communities and families are sometimes, often or usually hungry, or who lack nourishment, have rights to more than that. Good health, in all societies and at all levels, begins at and before birth. It is protected by exclusive breastfeeding, freedom from incessant infections and infestations, adequate and varied food supplies, and reliable sanitation and safe water. It is sustained also by public goods such as primary health care accessible to everybody, universal basic education, and the empowerment of people as citizens’.

Fourth, publishing and editorial policy. ‘Debates, commentary, challenges to conventional wisdom – these are the kinds of contribution that *WN* will carry... *WN* will also embrace the richness and variety of human experience and culture. It will pay attention to the points of view of societies and communities, in high-income as well as low-income regions and countries, that are impoverished or excluded, or that do not equate development with more cash, or whose ways of life are traditional’  
And finally: ‘The views expressed within *WN* are not those of the Association, unless this is explicitly stated. They are the judgements and opinions of the authors, who usually are Association members. Contributions will always invite and often will need responses, sometimes from alternative or opposing points of view’.

Written and agreed by the Association’s Council in early 2010, we think that after nearly two years our manifesto still stands up well.

## **The style of *WN***

*WN* is, we hope, attractive. Somebody, it may have been Albert Einstein, once said that the duty of the scientist is to present data and ideas as clearly, simply and attractively as possible, while always preserving their essential meaning. Let’s take this wise advice some stages further. First, it is surely everybody’s responsibility, all of the time, to be as clear as possible. Second, outstanding researchers may or may not be good at communicating their findings. It is very rare for one person to have all

relevant skills. Most scintillating science, like theatre, is teamwork.

Third, words are essential, but have limitations. Presentation, in the form of editorial structure and projection, design and art direction, and use of apt graphic material, is not merely illustrative. It can convey meaning more effectively than words (4). This is apparent in the most highly-gearred scientific journals, such as *Nature* and *Science*, and more popular journals, such as *Scientific American* and *New Scientist*. When Barrie Margetts and I first planned *WN*, we had the style of journals like these in mind. Also, the highest-impact academic journals whose contents overlap with ours, such as *The Lancet* and the *New England Journal of Medicine*, now convey their material by use of many editorial and graphic devices, such as boxed background or technical information, digested summaries, and take-home messages, together with vivid comment, invited or written by the editorial team.

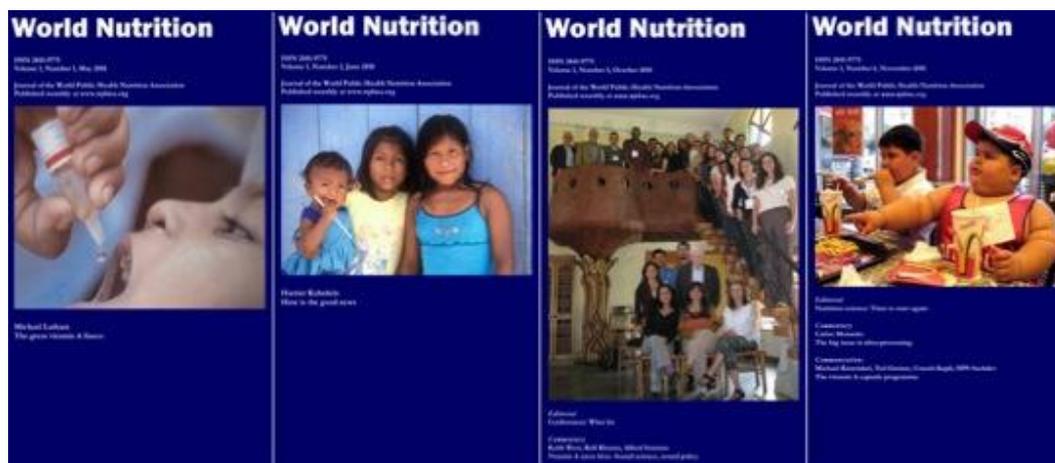
So there is nothing new in what we attempt to do, in *WN*. We are though, different from other nutrition journals, which with partial exceptions simply present the findings of original research, presented in standard formats. There is nothing wrong in this, and it does allow busy senior scientists to edit such journals. Outstanding research presented and published in this way can and does influence the profession addressed. The obvious limitation though, is such journals are usually not designed to be of interest to professionals in other while associated fields, and are certainly not going to be read by policy-makers and opinion-formers in national governments, industry or the media, unless they happen to be specialists in the field covered.

### ***Are we journalistic?***

Sometimes it's said that *WN* is 'journalistic'. But is this a real criticism? We see our task to include ways of editing and presentation that are as attractive, arresting and accessible as possible, but which also faithfully convey the meaning of the topic and the intentions of the authors. Yes, there is an issue of balance. We do not feel that *WN* contributions are over-simplified. But even if some are, we think this is a 'good fault'. It would be better than publishing over-technical pieces understood only by specialists and inaccessible to readers outside – and also within – our profession.

Like money, nutrition is important intrinsically, and also because of how it impacts on so many aspects of life. It follows that we have a constant duty to convey our ideas, insights and knowledge to readers who are not formally trained in nutrition. These include members of professions allied with ours, and workers in public interest and other civil society organisations, who we welcome as Association members. If readers of this justification summarised here disagree, please do use the response facility at the end of this commentary.

## 2010: Our first year



***First year: Michael Latham on vitamin A; Harriet Kuhnlein on good news; the future for nutrition conferences; Carlos Monteiro on ultra-processing***

This and the next two sections mention some of the commentaries carried in *WN* which, for one reason or another, have turned out to be outstanding, and which collectively give a idea of how far we have gone towards following the *WN* manifesto. Some of the choices are relatively easy to make, but they are inevitably selective, and many distinguished contributions are not mentioned here. Readers who would like to access any or all of *WN* can readily do so, simply by going to the ‘Previous months’ section at the foot of the Association’s website home page.

As mentioned, Michael Latham, working in close association with Ted Greiner, gave us the reason to inaugurate *WN*. His commentary was timely, important, and radical. The first issue of our journal included its cover and preliminary pages; our manifesto summarised above; the editorial which we always carry, usually linked with a main contribution; and the commentary itself. So we started *WN* with the theme of international food and nutrition policy. In the first week of publication, sessions overall on our site increased by a factor of four, as word of the commentary ‘went viral’

This was also the theme of the commentary by Harriet Kuhnlein in our second issue, in June, but its tone was very different. Harriet believes in accentuating the positive, and her commentary has the title ‘Here is the good news’. It relates some of the very remarkable successes of the McGill Centre for Indigenous Peoples’ Nutrition and Environment (CINE), of which she is the founder-director. One of the local leaders featured is Association member Elizabeth Okeke. CINE’s work in the Pacific region

has been enhanced by the leadership and inspiration of Lois Englberger.

In October our cover concerned the profession of public health nutrition. It related to the second of two editorials on the purposes of conferences in our and associated fields. These summarised concerns expressed by many colleagues on the close relationship between conference organisers, and those sections of industry whose policies and practices conflict with those of public health. On a positive note, we also outlined the principles and purposes of *Rio2012*, our own congress, which include interactivity, engagement with public interest organisations, and independence from conflicted interests. This issue also carried the rejoinder to Michael Latham's commentary by Keith West, Rolf Klemm and Al Sommer.

The first commentary by Association member Carlos Monteiro on ultra-processing, was published as an epic in November. Its theme is the conceptual framework of nutrition science itself, and its translation into recommendations and guidelines designed to protect health and prevent disease. In what is now a well-known statement, the commentary states: 'with nutrition and health, the issue is not food, and is not nutrients, so much as what is done to food before we buy and eat it. The issue, that is to say, is food processing'.

The November issue came on-line in the late evening of 29 October. On one day, Sunday 31 October, the total number of sessions on the commentary on ultra-processing was 6,445, and the site statistics showed that 2.93 gigabytes had been downloaded. Sessions on the commentary alone in the first three weeks of November totalled over 14,000, and on our website as a whole in November totalled 34,600, with 7.47 gigabytes downloaded. More on this in the section on 'impact', below.

By the end of 2010 a pattern of WN had emerged. In that year each month we carried about 50 pages an issue, which usually continues. (This month's issue is unusual). These were – and are – made up as follows:

- The cover and preliminary pages
- An editorial usually linked with the topic of the commentary
- The main monthly commentary
- Usually an additional shorter commentary.
- Letters and short pieces usually responding to previous commentaries
- Responses to other issues raised on the website or *WN*

We also began to publish position and policy papers, beginning in December with the first of two papers giving the Association's position on the nature, value, purpose and future of the UN System Standing Committee on Nutrition.

As an aside, production of the December issue was memorable. The scenery in the Grampian region of north Scotland where our web managers live and work is very beautiful, but at the end of the calendar year the weather is bitter. This year, record dumps of snow were recorded, lines went down, cars were buried, and internet communication was – well, let’s say not 100 per cent. Plus as with this issue now, we had to get the January issue out before Christmas. Thanks to Douglas Armstrong, and to Martin Evans of the Pewter agency who took over the job that month, we – just – stayed on schedule.

## 2011: The first half



***Early 2010: Carlos Monteiro on pyramids; RUTF stuff; Thomas Samaras on human size; and the DOHaD evidence on origins of human health***

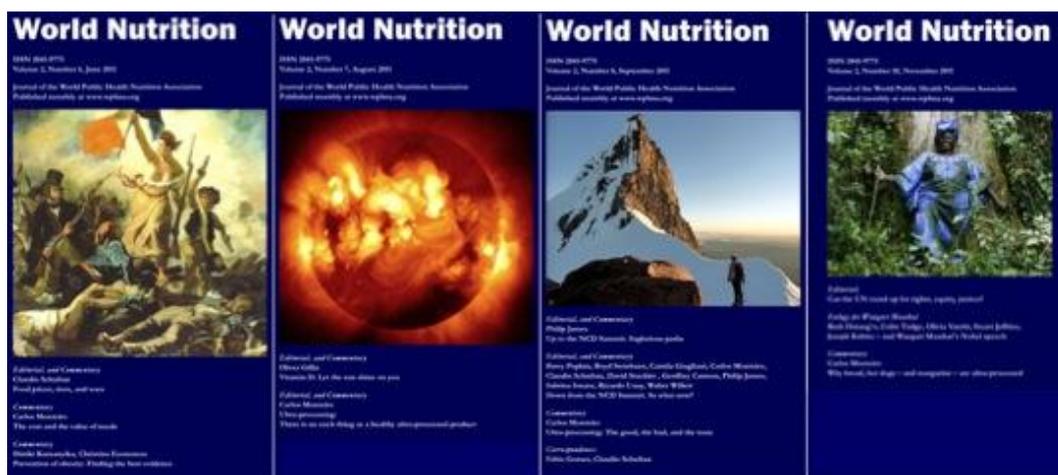
2011 began with a second cover related to what has turned out to be a series of short commentaries by Carlos Monteiro that we have published throughout 2011. The occasion was the major official US policy decision to abandon the ‘food guide pyramid’. Both Carlos and also Association member Walter Willett have campaigned against the pyramid for a long time. In February, Michael Latham’s last contribution to *WN* before he died in early April, was a commentary on ready-to-use therapeutic food (RUTF) co-authored with Urban Jonsson, Elisabeth Sterken, and George Kent. This caused a stir. It proposed first, that the use of RUTF be limited to the relief of severe acute malnutrition, and second, that its widespread use to prevent undernutrition is a potential severe threat to breastfeeding. Also, one benefit to transnational manufacturers of RUTF, in the period of life between weaning and say the age of 3-5, would be displacement of traditional dietary patterns by snacking of branded products seamlessly throughout life.

Cite as: Geoffrey Cannon. World nutrition and *World Nutrition* [Commentary] *World Nutrition* January 2012, 3, 1: 8-25

In March, Thomas Samaras presented his thesis that overall, it is better that humans be relatively short and small. In his view, based on many years of research, the case for the biological benefits of tall stature is inconclusive, and it is clearly true that from the environmental point of view it is better that people be small. Tom Samaras, a retired structural engineer, who therefore understands fitness for purpose, is in the great tradition of serious investigators who do not have formal academic qualifications in their field of study. It is disappointing that his commentary was not followed by contributions setting out the consensus view on stature and human diseases. In counterpoint though, the main April commentary is a summary of the radical position of the Developmental Origins of Health and Disease (DOHaD) organisation, in preparation for the September UN high-level meeting on prevention and control of non-communicable diseases. DOHaD's almost revolutionary position is that the right time in life to prevent disease is not so much in adult life, as standard recommendations imply, but very early in life, indeed beginning before conception.

In the first half of 2011, compared with the period before Carlos Monteiro's first commentary, page sessions had almost trebled, and settled at around 25,000 a month, with an average of around 5 gigabytes downloaded every month. This increase was evidently mostly driven by the ultra-processing series, a number of which always featured in 'top 10 most accessed' features, but other commentaries, and also some of the more vivid website home page news stories, regularly attracted more than 1,000 page sessions. ('Hits', not a meaningful figure, were around 10 times higher).

## 2011: The second half



***Later 2010: Claudio Schuftan on food wars; Oliver Gillie on vitamin D; Philip James on the UN NCD summit; eulogies for Wangari Maathai***

Cite as: Geoffrey Cannon. World nutrition and *World Nutrition*  
[Commentary] *World Nutrition* January 2012, 3, 1: 8-25

The second half of 2011 began in June and then after a break in August, with two striking commentaries on food and nutrition policies. First, Claudio Schuftan examined the ideologies that underlie rising and fluctuating food prices, and what these mean for impoverished populations. Claudio, a medical doctor with vast field and other experience in Africa and Asia, is a leading advocate of the human right to adequate and nourishing food. His commentary, pointing to evidence that instability in staple food prices is a cause of riots, uprisings and even wars, is uneasy reading.

Then Oliver Gillie, an author who for many years was medical and health correspondent of the *The Sunday Times* and then *The Independent*, presented his thesis that the vitamin D generated by sunlight is crucial to human health and for protection from many diseases. His commentary challenges current official recommendations for vitamin D intake, and emphasises what is now well understood, that need for vitamin D, which normally is predominately from sunlight, varies vastly in different climates.

In September Association member Philip James delivered a blockbuster commentary on the history and politics leading up to the UN high-level meeting on NCDs. This was accompanied by a series of short communications on the same topic, whose contributors included Association members Barry Popkin, Walter Willett, Ricardo Uauy, Sabrina Ionata, Claudio Schuftan, Carlos Monteiro, and myself, as well as Boyd Swinburn, Camila Giugliani and David Stuckler. These two commentaries were, we know, read with attention by officials preparing for and attending the UN high-level meeting, and drafting its final Political Declaration.

The all-time record so far for the record number of page sessions in any one month was in August; a total of 47,798. The main single driver throughout the year remains Carlos Monteiro's ultra-processing monthly commentaries, which taken together have attracted over 75,000 sessions. Throughout 2011 our website, including *WN*, attracted a total of around 350,000 page sessions, and 50 gigabytes were downloaded. Readers come from about 90 countries and territories in all continents. Around one-third, and sometimes more, are recorded as being from the US. People registered in around 25 countries in Europe, 25 in Asia, and 12-25 in Africa, access the site every month, with lower figures from other continents.

## Impact

Are the figures for page sessions, downloads and countries accessing our site, which mainly are for *WN*, impressive? They have risen by a factor of over 10 since the

period immediately before the launch of *WN*, and are now around 5 times higher than they were in our first month of May 2010. So yes, the figures are comparatively good. But perhaps they should be 10 or more times higher. Or perhaps our figures indicate saturation coverage, though we think this is not likely. We don't yet have information from comparable journals.

What we also don't have, is the technical Impact Factor. This is gained by journals whose main function is to publish the results of original research, whose papers are subjected to external peer review. Commentaries should be well-based on sound evidence, of different types, but as pieces that by their nature express ideas and opinions are not normally reviewed externally, as can be seen from the editorial and commentary pages of leading journals that also publish original research findings. We very much doubt that an Impact Factor would give us useful information, because it is based on the number of times contributions are referenced in other peer-reviewed journals. The main impact we are looking for is not so much on other journals, as on the outside world – on public affairs and public policy. We hope to be able to report further here, later this year.

## Issues

'Issues' or 'considerations' include shortcomings. The distinguished and influential US writer Michael Pollan tells us that *WN* is the outstanding journal in our – and his – field. He regularly advertises our commentaries, especially the ultra-processing series, on his impressive website and twitter network. So that's nice. Most of our authors – and other contributors to our website – pay us compliments. And we know that *WN* is read with attention by influential people in UN agencies, national governments, industry and the media, and in civil society organisations. So that's good. We are however conscious of various shortcomings and deficiencies. Some we think we can correct. Most need the active support of Association members and other potential team members and contributors.

### *Age and gender*

Experience should breed wisdom, and we have no prejudice against older contributors. Just as well, perhaps... But we are lacking contributions from young people, say under the age of 40. We suspect that there is a vicious circle operating here. Young members of the Association – and there are plenty of them now – may often feel put off or even intimidated by senior contributors. All we can say right now, to younger readers, is please become bold. There are role models within the Association,

including our regular website column contributors Fabio Gomes and Reggie Annan. But this brings us to the next issue...

A count of our members' profiles now shows that exactly half are women, whereas most WN contributors are men. We are not happy about this. We welcomed the outstanding recent commentary by Association member Shiriki Kumanyika and Christina Economos on the evaluation of evidence as a basis for public health recommendations, with particular enthusiasm. We were saddened by the fact that a substantial number of recent contributions from women were in response to the deaths of Michael Latham, Lois Englberger, (on our website), and Wangari Maathai. This is not just a matter of 'gender politics'. By their nature women, whether or not they are mothers or caregivers, have insights into nutrition and health that men may lack. Plus as the campaigning nutritionist Caroline Walker often pointed out, who is it who usually does the shopping and cooking?

### ***Asia and Africa***

As mentioned in this month's editorial, of the total of 65 WN authors to date, 13 are from Africa, and 16 are from Asia and the Pacific region. But as we also say, these statistics are misleading. Most such contributions have been letters, eulogies or short communications. So, here is our call for full-scale commentaries from Africa and Asia, please. As further said in our editorial, what exactly does this mean? Does our originally Chilean columnist Claudio Schuftan count as from Asia because he lives in Vietnam – or will, until he moves to California in a couple of years' time? Do Association members who are nationals of African countries 'not count' when they are working for a while or indefinitely in US or UK universities? Common sense is needed here. What we want is major contributions that convey the special circumstances of Asian and African countries – and also, on this point, from Russia and former USSR countries, the Islamic world, and southern Europe.

### ***Politics and activism***

Some readers feel that WN is too 'political' or 'activist', and we take this concern seriously. First though, what does this criticism mean? It's interesting to note that Latin languages have the same word for 'politics' as they have for 'policy', and very sensible too. We certainly should be engaged with food, nutrition and allied policies.

We think what is meant goes something like this. Some WN contributions, including most of those of which Carlos Monteiro is author, do indeed challenge not – emphatically not – the food industry as a whole, but the policies and practices of transnational manufacturers of ultra-processed products.

Some other contributions don't agree with generally accepted positions. Michael Latham's commentaries, including that on ready-to-use therapeutic food of which he is a co-author, are examples. So is the commentary proposing that overall, 'small is best – that it would be better if the human species was relatively short – and Tom Samaras, the author, is not a biological scientist but a retired structural engineer. Whether Oliver Gillie's commentary on vitamin D could now be counted as heterodox, is hard to say: after years of research he has a lot of support from the specialist scientific community, while also having something important to say about sunlight.

Other *WN* contributions, such as Claudio Schuftan's commentary on food prices and food uprisings and wars, see causal links between the current dominant 'casino capitalism' and malnutrition in all its forms, together with increasing outrageous inequity. This certainly is an example of an 'activist' piece, in the sense of being radically political and indeed coming from a socialist position. Claudio is a leading member of the People's Health Movement, as are a number of Association members.

On reflection, the issue here is one of balance. The *WN* manifesto, summarised above, also states: 'The need is for a journal whose contributors have scope to think and reflect on the significance of established and emerging experience and evidence, and on how best to shape policies and programmes that protect the human species, the living and physical world, and the biosphere, now and in future'. Then it goes on to say: 'Properly perceived, nutrition *is* public health nutrition... Changes in the nutritional health of populations are usually not the result of actions for which nutrition professionals are responsible'.

Such sound statements can be interpreted differently. For example, the commentary supplied by members of the Developmental Origins of Health and Disease (DOHaD) and the epic account by Association member Philip James of the circumstances leading up to last September's UN high-level meeting on NCDs, are both outstanding examples of our manifesto in action. Both have to the best of our knowledge been accepted as important contributions to international food and nutrition policy and practice, while both are at least in part, radical and even decidedly controversial.

Should we shrink from controversy? Nobody as far as we know is seriously suggesting this. As soon as nutrition engages with social, economic and environmental issues, it gets into new territory, and public health has always by its nature involved debate and even conflict. In any case, there are plenty of journals whose main task is descriptive, which usually do not challenge any status quo. But this is no reason for *WN* to be constantly contentious, or even to be reasonably seen as such. As said above, it is a question of balance. We greatly valued Harriet Kuhnlein's 'good news' commentary. We should get into a habit of celebrating the work of members before the time comes

to eulogise them after their death. We are missing commentaries and other contributions that recognise the achievements of institutions and initiatives – as well as our own, with *Rio2012!* Especially in these tough times, we need to communicate solid progress. There is a ‘but’, though. We cannot invent such contributions. We need to hear from Association members and other readers who have good news to tell.

### ***Responses come there few***

Related to this concern, perhaps our main disappointment so far, is lack of constant responses to *WN* contributions. So far we have carried letters from 44 correspondents (some jointly signing a letter), 12 short communications; and also eulogies for Wangari Maathai and Michael Latham from 21 people. The average of over two correspondents an issue is quite a lot more than is found in longer established print journals in our field, but is far lower than in journals that have a geared-up rapid response facility. Also, most of the letters we have published are on a small number of commentaries: the vitamin A issue notably, and a bunch on RUTFs, and also ultra-processing.

Our impression is that unlike other and allied areas, such as epidemiology and public health generally, people concerned with nutrition are not yet accustomed to discuss their ideas and work in public. We know that *WN* is read with attention by knowledgeable and interested people. Most such people are very busy, true. Experience so far suggests that responses come usually only as a result of direct requests, usually by contributors. General appeals seem not to work – but we are here and now asking, please, for responses. Usually these can simply be made on the response facility at the end of *WN* contributions.

## **The future**

The final statement made in our *WN* manifesto says: ‘In time, if the Association membership wants this, and if a substantial number of members become contributors, **World Nutrition** may develop into a full-scale journal complete with rapid response capability. To achieve this, we need more Association members to join the editorial team and to contribute. That’s up to you’.

Nearly two years on, this reads like wishful thinking. Certainly, many Association members are *WN* contributors. But yes, we are calling for members to come forward and to take shared responsibility for *WN*. And as indicated above, we need to find, develop and publish more good news, perhaps particularly in what are now dark times. Come and join us.

## Notes

- 1 This view of independence is reflected in the policy of our Rio2012 congress taking place this coming April. Income for the congress comes from registration fees, and from publicly funded bodies such as the Brazilian government and its agencies. No funds or any other support are coming from industry or any other sources with interests that conflict with those of public health.
- 2 Parallel discussions took place concerning international congresses for which the Association would be responsible, to be held every four years, conducted according to the agreed policies on independence and transparency. This led to a call for local partners, and agreement on the *Rio2012* congress, being held in partnership with the Brazilian national public health organisation Abrasco. This is another story.
- 3 The current contents of our website include but are not confined to:
  - General news usually featuring members and their work
  - News up to and down from the 2011 UN Summit (less now)
  - News and information about *Rio 2012*
  - This includes a link to the *Rio2012* dedicated website
  - Members' profiles – usually 6 a month
  - Columns/blogs
  - 'Sites we like' (occasional)
  - A 'this month' item
  - A 'previous issues' archive
  - Membership services including the facility to apply on-line
  - Aims and objectives of the Association
  - Details of the Council, and Frequently Asked Questions
  - A link to our social media coverage
  - A contents column
  - This links to WN which is 'nested' inside our site.
- 4 More radical thinkers say that in the beginning was not the word but the image, and that the projection is the meaning. This idea is easily understood in those parts of the world whose written language is not alphabetic but, in its origins, pictographic.

## **Acknowledgement and request**

*Readers may make use of the material in this commentary, provided acknowledgement is given to the authors and the Association, and W<sub>N</sub> is cited.*

*Please cite as:* Cannon G. World nutrition and *World Nutrition* [Commentary] *World Nutrition*, January 2012; 3, 1, 8-25. Obtainable at [www.wphna.org](http://www.wphna.org)

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*GC states:* The Association website, including *World Nutrition*, in 2010 was managed by Douglas Armstrong, and since December 2010 by Martin Evans, both working in the Grampian region of north Scotland, near Aberdeen. The design of our journal each month has been fulfilled by them, often working under pressure. We are very grateful. As editor and on behalf of the Association I am also very grateful to all *W<sub>N</sub>* contributors, and in particular the authors of our commentaries, who have accepted editorial proposal which sometimes have been fairly radical, with good humour. Most of all, thanks to Carlos Monteiro, who has worked with me on his epic series on ultra-processing while at the same time directing a major university department, and himself being editor of a major nutrition journal. Finally, I will always miss Michael Latham's energy and commitment; he will always be an inspiration to us who uphold public health and nutrition, in particular in the South. I have no conflicts of interest.

*W<sub>N</sub> commentaries are subject to internal review by members of the editorial team.*