

Low and middle income countries are the recent targets of processed food manufacturers

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"There is significant penetration by multinational processed food manufacturers such as Nestle, Kraft, PepsiCo, and Danone into food environments in low-and-middle income countries, where consumption of unhealthy commodities is reaching—and in some cases exceeding—a level presently observed in high income countries", according to international researchers writing in this week's *PLoS Medicine*.

The authors from the UK, US, and India (led by David Stuckler from the University of Cambridge), analysed trends in unhealthy food and beverages (sugary drinks and processed foods that are high in salt, fat, and sugar), alcohol, and tobacco commodities by reviewing market data on sales covering 80 countries between 1997 and 2010 with forecasts to the year 2016.

The authors found that not only is the rate of increase in [consumption](#) of "unhealthy commodities" fastest in low-and [middle-income countries](#) but the pace at which consumption is rising in these countries is even faster than has occurred historically in high income countries. Furthermore, multinational companies have now achieved a level of penetration of food markets in middle-income countries similar to what they have achieved in high income countries.

In their analysis, the authors also found that higher intake of unhealthy foods correlates strongly with higher tobacco and alcohol sales,

suggesting a set of common tactics by industries producing unhealthy commodities. And while rising income has been strongly associated with higher consumption of unhealthy commodities within countries and over time, the authors found that economic growth does not inevitably lead to higher unhealthy-commodity consumption as high foreign direct investment and free-trade agreements also play a role.

The authors argue that with the global rise of transnational food and drink companies there is a clear need to focus on the role of global producers in manufacturing and marketing the unhealthy commodities implicated in the epidemics of non-communicable diseases—conditions such as coronary heart disease and diabetes.

The authors say: "Until health practitioners, researchers, and politicians are able to understand and identify feasible ways to address the social, economic, and political conditions that lead to the spread of unhealthy food, beverage, and tobacco [commodities](#), progress in areas of prevention and control of non-communicable diseases will remain elusive."

More information: Stuckler D, McKee M, Ebrahim S, Basu S (2012) Manufacturing Epidemics: The Role of Global Producers in Increased Consumption of Unhealthy Commodities Including Processed Foods, Alcohol, and Tobacco. *PLoS Med* 9(6): e1001235.
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