



## **ILSI 2021 Annual Symposium Session 5: Considerations for Implementing Globally Harmonized Nutrient Reference Values**

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**Transcript of the presentation, Regulation and Labeling Considerations for Implementing Harmonized NRVs, [Anna Lartey](#), PhD, University of Ghana, Ghana**

My topic is, as has been mentioned, looking at labeling regulations and harmonized nutrient reference values. I think Lindsay's presentation clearly lays the foundation for the presentation I am about to make. In terms of disclosures, I am a member of the Micronutrient Forum, I'm a board member of the Micronutrient Forum. I joined about a month ago. Now, in terms of this topic, my interest in this topic goes far back when I was a member of the Ghana delegation to the Codex Committee on Nutrition for Special Dietary Uses, where nutrient reference values are actively discussed. Also, when I served as Director of Nutrition at FAO, we worked very closely with WHO in looking at nutrient reference values that to go on next.

Why are nutrient reference values now coming in so strongly? I'd like to establish a little bit of a background. An analysis that has been done by various groups shows that no dietary risk factors have become a major cause or contributor to the burden of disease. And this is seen in various parts of the world. Globally, we see that the malnutrition in all its forms is the leading contributor to the burden of disease. In high burden countries, you see a similar pattern. In low-income countries, you see a similar pattern, where our dietary factors are creating problems. And in fact, an analysis that was done shows that poor diet actually contributes about 20% of premature deaths.

Now, the problem about a poor diet is seeing, and the rising prevalence of overweight and obesity, you can see the negative impacts of the way we are eating here. No region has actually been able to reduce the prevalence of overweight and obesity. And even in low-income countries, overweight and obesity prevalence are rising very fast. So, in the last three to four years, many groups and organizations have come out requesting that we actually look at our food systems, transform our food systems to ensure that they deliver on healthy diets. The Global Panel on Agriculture and Food Systems, the High-Level Panel of Experts of, the Committee on World Food Security, the Future of Food, various groups have come out, but an important aspect of this food systems transformation is the consumer.

There's the call to actually empower the consumer so that they can make healthy dietary choices. And this can be achieved through mandated nutrition labeling. Very, very important. After all, the consumer buys the food, and if they are empowered, they can buy the right food with that information, the right information that they are given. So, this then brings us to a topic of food labeling and its importance for the consumer. It provides the consumer with information about the product to be able to make that informed decision. It also provides information on the nutrients on the package. Really, this is so crucial,

they have to know what is in the package. It also builds consumer confidence in packaged foods. We all go to the shop, we look at the label and we are able to decide whether to buy this product or not.

It also protects the consumer health and prevents her from false and misleading nutrition claims. Misleading nutrition claims happens in almost every country. Now, to show this example about how important food labeling is and how it can actually help the consumer make a decision. I would like to just present the example of the Chile experience. Chile actually has been experiencing rising prevalence of overweight and obesity, especially in children, the figures were really high. In 2016, they enacted a law on food labeling where in advertising to be able to cap this epidemic. So, they came up with these labels, these black octagonal labels. So, they use these labels because they are easy to understand the front of the pack labeling. And with this labeling, if you have this label on the product, that means that that product cannot be advertised to children under 14 years, or could you include a toy in that product.

They've also food containing those products that cannot be sold in or near schools. So, the intention is not that these products cannot be manufactured, but rather it will help change the food environment by informing the consumers about the composition of the product, the fact, the sodium, the calories and the sugar. And the labels are so clear that when the consumer sees it, they would be able to understand it. It's so simple, very simple, easy to recognize, and to be understood, that the consumer can easily make a decision for themselves. Now for such a labeling policy to work, it will require the collaboration of all stakeholders. It will require the governments coming out to enact these laws and regulations. It will require the food industry to comply. And what would that mean? So that they comply to these regulations. It will require the scientists to provide the evidence for making these policies and also to require the consumer corporation to make an informed, good choices.

So, all of these stakeholders must come on board. Now let's talk about, Lindsay has given us a background about harmonizing nutrient reference values, but we also need to talk about harmonizing food labeling regulations, because if you have harmonized regulations, it's going to avoid confusion for the consumer, because they have to deal with different market labels, which can be confusing. But if it's someone nice, it makes it easy. It gives better understanding for consumer and industry because they will all be following the same rules. It also makes it easier for Codex to elaborate and update a single food labeling standard. And also, it fosters original harmonization of labeling policies because now with globalized trade, it makes it very easy. Finally, it's also easier and less costly for food industry to comply with these labeling rules. This document you have here is a report, a book that was published by FAO in 2016.

And it gives really background on some of these labeling policies. That how countries can really have some of these harmonized labeling policies, but an important thing is some of the liberals are mandatory and some are voluntary. In my presentation here, I'll be talking mainly about the mandatory policies. These mandatory rules require that all food products carry the same information. Okay. And also, the labeling legislation will apply to all foods, whether imported or nationally produced. They should have common information. Now, in a mandatory food product, what's the kind of information you would need? The identity of the food; the name, the amount, the contact information, the information, the manufacturer, their country of origin and the lot number. You also need information, the ingredient list. What really went into that product, and I've highlighted the quantitative nutrient declaration because that is really relevant to our presentation here.

And I'll come to that in a few minutes. And then also, the food additives that have been added, and then also the data market. Data market is very important because it helps the consumer to determine and

expect in terms of the safety and the quality of the food. Now, let's talk about the nutrient declaration that we will see on a label. So, the quantitative nutrient declaration. Codex recommends mandatory declaration of nutrients content on the label. And here what we should be declared are the energy, the protein, available carbohydrates, total fats, saturated fats, sodium, and total sugars, and also some vitamins and minerals. Now the way this is declared is very important. Some were declared as nutrients per serving, or per 100 grams or per 100 meals, depending on the nature of the product.

Now with this, in terms of the mandatory nutritional information, some also look at reporting it as a percentage of the nutrient reference values. Now, Lindsay has already laid down the basis for the nutrient reference value, so I'm not going into that. When you express the value as a percentage of nutrient reference value, it provides an overview of the nutrient level in the food. It also enables the consumer to compare the percentage, nutrient reference values of different packaged foods. And so be able to decide which food to choose because of the percent contribution.

Now, Codex proposed nutrient reference values for nutrition labeling purposes in the interest of harmonization. And these were put forth by FAO and WHO in 2004. Now this table shows the Codex proposed reference values. As I said, these are from 2004 and at the moment FAO and WHO are looking at revising some of these nutrient reference values. The process that they go through here and Lindsay took us through in details on these processes, she gave it in her presentation show. I would not spend too much time on this light or the potent thing that I want to highlight is that there is also public consultation. So, where you see PC, PC means public consultation. So, at some point the document or the questions that need to be addressed needs to be put out for public consultation to collect public views on it. So, this is done also as parts of the process.

Codex has also two types of nutrient reference values. They have nutrient reference values requirement, and this is based more on, it refers to nutrient reference values that are based on the levels of nutrients associated with nutrient requirement. And this is really what Lindsay has presented on. Then there are also the nutrient reference values based on non-communicable diseases. And these are based on the levels of nutrients associated with a reduction in the risk of non-communicable diseases. So CodeHS has established NRV-NCDs for saturated fatty acids. Here about 20 grams for saturated fatty acids, and for sodium 2000 milligrams. That means that you will be choosing NRV-NCDs that have lower or up to these values because lower or up to these values, they will be associated with reduced risk. So, these are the two categories of NRVs that Codex has established. Talking about harmonized nutrient reference values for global use. With international trade harmonized nutrient reference values provide a uniform basis to compare nutrient contributions of similar products.

You know, so here I'm talking about the values themselves being harmonized. So those countries who use harmonize values, and there is a value in this because you can compare the nutrient contribution of similar products. One consumer goes on the market, the consumer is bombarded with so many products of the same product, you have so many variations, and this will really help the consumer a lot. Harmonized NRVs will also provide the same denominator because the same denominator who is assessing nutrient claims. Harmonize nutrient reference values will also facilitate monitoring and enforcement of labeling policies and countries will be able to meet the labeling policies of the international markets. We can set a common labeling policy and then we have harmonized nutrient reference values so that it makes it very easy to actually set common policies for markets and for countries to be able to trade among themselves because we are actually harmonized in the process. So again, as has been said, I would say, that food labeling policy, which includes a set of laws and guidelines

for establishing this information. And these provide the basis for what's needs to be done now. Because you may be confused when you have different forms of labeling on food products, simple standard diet.

... of labeling on food products. Simple, standardized non-misleading labeling is needed to facilitate consumer understanding. And then harmonized food labels are desirable based on what I've said earlier on, because it tells the consumer. And then finally to come to the harmonized nutrient reference values are also needed because they provide a common basis for comparing similar package products. They can facilitate trade between regions and countries when we use the same values, then when every country has his own values and that can create problems for the consumer. On this note, I like to say a big thank you for this opportunity.