DIET, PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND HEALTH -
A EUROPEAN PLATFORM FOR ACTION

4 MAY 2010, 10.00 – 17.00

CENTRE DE CONFERENCES ALBERT BORSCHETTE
36, rue Froissart, B - 1040 Brussels

AGENDA

1. INTRODUCTION BY THE COMMISSION

Members were welcomed by the new Director General of SANCO, Ms Paula Testori Coggi, who explained that she has followed the work and achievements of the Platform for some time, having participated in the Round-table on Obesity which was the genesis of the Platform. Pioneered in SANCO, the Platform has led the way for a new way of working across the European Commission - a multi-stakeholder action driven by commitments for action by the stakeholders themselves. Platform members encompass the three pillars of SANCO: health, consumers and food making it a critical tool for the Directorate-General.

2010 is a pivotal year for the Platform: an evaluation of the Platform is underway which will identify successes and any shortcomings so that future work satisfies expectations and partners. The evaluation report is timely to the midterm review of the EU Nutrition Strategy by Sanco, which will be presented at a Presidency conference in December. The Platform evaluation is one input to the progress report.

Members of the Platform welcomed Ms Testori Coggi to the Platform. They noted the ongoing commitment of the Commission to the Platform through the direct management of senior staff and the close relationship to the EU Strategy.

EPHA recommended looking beyond the content of the commitments to assess their relevance to the objectives of the EU Strategy.

CIAA commented that involvement in the Platform has been a positive journey, but the Commission's external communication about the Platform and the results of the commitments is very limited and more attention needs to be given to this.

IBFAN has a more critical view, taking on a watchdog role and a risk management approach. They seek to ensure that the NGOs are not coerced into partnership with the food industry and have concerns about corporate funding of education. The international normative impact of the Platform was highlighted, which could be harmful if other countries are encouraged to adopt this type of approach, but lack the civil society capacity to engage effectively.

BEUC noted that more attention should be paid to the content of the commitments rather than the mechanics of monitoring. New areas where progress is needed either through discussion or in the commitments should be identified, e.g. calorie labelling, price of food products and the role of pricing, marketing and reformulation.

FEPI reminded participants that physical activity is also within the remit of the Platform and called
for the Platform to pay equal attention to the two pillars of nutrition and physical activity. ECF echoed this message, calling for greater emphasis on the 'energy out' part of the energy in/energy out equation.

IBFAN drew attention to the recently adopted World Health Assembly recommendations on Diet and Physical Activity, which state that settings where children gather should be free from marketing of food that is high fat, salt and sugar. This would address the issue of conflict of interest such as children seeing vouchers on confectionary to be collected for sports equipment. They urge the Platform to be looking at issues like the taste profile of products, particularly the intense sweetness, which is appealing to children.

WFA commented that the dynamic of exchange between Platform members should not be underestimated, the constructive engagement has resulted in stakeholders reassessing their points of views on very important issues – something which may not be captured in the monitoring and evaluation process. They feel that a degree of confidence and trust between the members has developed by focusing on what organisations can contribute. This is important as it has driven a culture of accountability and is a fundamental change in the way that stakeholders engage.

EPHA cautioned that although it is important to look at the Platform's achievements, the bigger picture should always be kept in focus. The questions that need to be answered about the Platform are: could we have achieved the same things and more effectively in a different way? Are other tools more effective and could deliver more?

The Commission thanked the Platform members for their comments and noted that when the Platform was initiated, there was some doubt about whether such a process would be possible. The exchange of views today shows how far the discussions have evolved.

2. EVALUATION OF THE PLATFORM - UPDATE

Ms Vanessa Ludden, Senior Consultant, The Evaluation Partnership

The evaluation seeks to explore the Platform as a process. A questionnaire was sent to all 33 Platform members. 32 have replied and 31 members have taken part in follow-up interviews. The findings have been analysed for inclusion into the draft final report. 22 complementary interviews were also carried out with 9 MS representatives, 6 national platforms, 2 platform members, 2 observers and other stakeholders. The desk research has been very extensive, and the two case studies on marketing to children and food reformulation have involved interviews with NGOs/industry, review of the commitment methodology and analysis of the actions. The draft final report is due next week, and it will go to the Steering Group on 14 May which will meet on 28 May to provide feedback. A revised report will be submitted to the Commission on 24 June before being formally presented to the Platform on 1 July.

There were several questions about the external communication of the evaluation. The Commission responded that the evaluation is carried out by an independent evaluator and the final document will be published and available from the Commission website. Issues relating to the communication of the evaluation can be discussed on 1 July when it is presented to the Platform as time is needed to read and digest the information contained in the report. The Steering Group will agree on the key messages about the evaluation to be communicated which will be included in a press release that will accompany the publication of the report.
3. 2010 PLATFORM ANNUAL REPORT

3.1 MONITORING AND UPDATE ON PROGRESS

• Introduction on progress made on the monitoring of the commitments - Ms Anne Auffret, European Commission, Sanco 02

In 2009 the Platform examined the issues of reformulation, labelling, lifestyle education, advertising and monitoring and physical activity. There was a noticeable improvement in the monitoring by Platform members. In terms of average quality score, there was an increase from 3.05 to 3.3 out of 5. This is a positive result of the learning process and understanding on how to monitor more effectively, assisted by the workshop on monitoring. In the next few weeks, examples of good practice of monitoring will be circulated. It will include examples in fields such as policy and advocacy, which have often been considered by members as harder to monitor. Several comments on the monitoring system are included in the evaluation report and these will be taken into account by SANCO. The database for members to enter new commitments will remain open until the end of November. Some commitments are due to expire this year, and Platform members were reminded that they must have at least one active commitment in order to participate in the Platform. The usual timelines for monitoring apply in 2010, meaning the deadline for submitting monitoring forms is the end of January 2011.

• Presentation of the Report - Dr Tom Ling, Director, Evaluation and Audit, RAND Europe

This is the 5th Annual monitoring report that RAND have conducted on behalf of the Platform. As in previous years, the most common commitments by members relate to lifestyles (51%), followed by marketing and advertising (19%). The monitoring report is an opportunity to see whether all issues are being covered through the commitments or whether there are gaps. For example, the general public is the target audience for a significant proportion of commitments (49%), whereas just 7% are targeted at policy-makers.

The monitoring report is intended to contribute to a wider debate, but the monitoring process itself has received a lot of attention. The monitoring methodology covers four challenging commitment criteria: measuring, focus, specificity and clarity. Although these criteria work fairly well, some subjective judgement is used. A great deal of effort has been put into ensuring scoring is consistent. The lowest scoring criteria were focus and clarity whilst the highest scoring was measurement. Recommendations for improvement include: provide specific annual objectives that can be monitored and constitute the commitment’s goals and targets for that given year; move away from describing the commitment actions and focus more on information and indicators; link the different sections of the form to increase understanding of the scale/scope of the commitment; consider merging commitments if there is considerable overlap and monitoring them separately is difficult.

In the discussion, Platform members expressed that in order to get high scores on monitoring, there was a temptation to make simpler and less complex commitments with a narrower scope. Another challenge is that EU level umbrella organisations may rely on their members to implement the commitments and therefore are not in control of the quality of the monitoring. FERCO explained that they fit into this category, as their members are individual companies that operate at national or regional level and FERCO is therefore dependent on the completeness of the reporting of their members. However, despite their low monitoring score, FERCO felt that the Platform has had a positive impact on their operations.
The Commission stated that the monitoring framework was jointly built by the Platform and the Commission, implying acceptance by all parties. It was also highlighted that lowering the ambition of commitments because of monitoring challenges was definitely not the right approach and the objective sought for. The purpose of monitoring is to make members accountable for the delivery of their commitments and to show whether the Platform is delivering results.

IBFAN raised concerns that external stakeholders including Member States are interpreting the report to understand that a well monitored commitment is an appropriate commitment. This is not necessarily the case because important elements such as policy coherence are not addressed by the monitoring process. There needs to be a broader understanding of what the commitments are trying to achieve, because some objectives are not quantifiable such as IBFAN's commitment to increase the number of women in Europe that breastfeed.

RAND noted that the monitors have greatly appreciated the good grace with which Platform members have engaged with the system. It is important that the monitoring mechanism does not drive down the content of the Platform through limiting the ambition or scope of commitments. The training and support offered to Platform members could, if needed, be revised.

EPHA commented that monitoring helps to show that Platform members are doing what they commit to do, although there are some flaws in the system. Whilst respecting the voluntary nature of the commitments, the Commission should give clear messages about what type of actions they expect to be taken in relation to the EU Strategy and by whom. A discussion on the commitments is needed, addressing what is being done, why and how? This is a separate conversation from the debate on the monitoring system. EPHA noted that given the intensive time input required for the monitoring, the quantitative model can overshadow the qualitative evaluation elements.

This concern was noted by other members of the Platform. BEUC commented that it can be hard to capture some of its regular activities and what is being done by all their member organisations in the reporting template. There is also no process for looking in-depth at the commitments to identify a good commitment, and space is needed for discussion about whether that type of commitment could be done differently or by different organisations.

The Commission summarised the comments on monitoring as follows:
- monitoring is a very important tool and must continue;
- there may be trade-offs between ambition/quality, and this affects the content of commitments;
- monitoring has value as a pedagogic tool;
- monitoring reflects the commitments made in accordance with the Charter, which is the overall framework for Platform work

The issues raised can be addressed at the next platform meeting on 1 July 2010 when the Platform evaluation report will be discussed and taken into account in the broader debate on the future of the Platform. The Commission noted that the agenda of Platform meetings is designed to encourage debate on commitments – the afternoon sessions are devoted to presentations of specific commitments, and Platform members have the opportunity to ask critical questions.
4. REFORMULATION

4.1 PLATFORM COMMITMENTS

**Introduction to the reformulation efforts under the Platform - Ms Tamsin Rose, Event Tech**

Salt and trans-fats have been the primary focus of reformulation efforts to date. Government support has been the catalyst for the increased reformulation trend by industry. Implementation has been inconsistent across Europe, and there are tensions on approach: single nutrient vs whole food, competition vs industry wide cooperation, marketing vs stealth changes. The impact of reformulation is hard to quantify because of the lack of adequate data on dietary intakes.

Lessons learned from salt and trans-fat reformulations are that measurable targets and monitoring are essential. Financial resources and technical support can be useful for SMEs. Clear political goals need to be set by government, and negotiations with all sectors of the food industry and cross-sector agreements are needed for some product categories. Successful delivery can be supported through name and praise and consumer awareness needs to be raised and regularly evaluated. A focus on high risk, hard-to-reach groups can help to bridge socio-economic gaps.

Looking forward to reformulation of sugar and fat, there are a number of issues to be considered:

- **Technology** – what techniques work for fat or sugar, food safety and structure aspects, potential health impact of substitute nutrients, competition or collaboration on new tools;
- **Consumers** – what is the marketplace for reformulated products, publicising the change or stealth;
- **Cost** – who pays what, when and how;
- **Policy** – relationship between food standards and nutrient criteria and the potential for reformulation.

**"Club 4-10", – Ms Anna Verga, Brand Manager, Coop Italia**

Italy has one million children aged 6-11, and despite having high rates of childhood obesity, awareness of the problem is low. Some 40% of mothers do not understand that their children have a weight problem. The Coop (one million members) worked with two scientific societies to develop nutrition guidelines for Club 4-10, because this is the key age group to set behavioural patterns. The aim is to offer a new own label range of healthy food products which are good value for money, tasty and respond to consumer needs. This has resulted in a significant change in the assortment of products aimed at children. 8 products that cannot be reformulated have been withdrawn, 5 existing products have been reformulated and 18 new products have been developed - mainly focused on snacks and breakfast. Club 4-10 products have no tropical fats, only natural flavourings, reduced calories and critical macro-nutrients but increased fibre. Snacks are the most significant market and were tackled first. There is an extended food label with information on 100g and a single portion based on the calorie needs of a 6 year old child. There are no health claims, but nutrition claims are made. The new products received a lot of media attention with a resulting sales impact (cakes sales exceeded marketing estimates by 30%). The project has been very fast, just 12 months from concept stage to the market launch for the new products.

In response to a question about access for lower socio-economic groups, the Coop explained that these product lines are part of their own brands, which has a pricing policy of undercutting the main commercial products. Therefore, there are no barriers for poorer families.

A concern about the use of health professionals to market commercial products was raised along with the promotion to children of snacks. The COOP explained that the role of health professionals was to develop the nutritional guidelines and to manage the content of a website which has been launched, which allows doctors and experts to respond to consumer questions.
**"Salt Reformulation" – Ms Anne Heughan, European External Affairs Director, Unilever**

Salt has been the focus of major reformulation efforts, some examples of this work include cutting salt content of dry soups and sauces by 10-15%. Information on sodium is now included on the product nutrition label and information on salt in the GDA. All countries have a different starting point, so although work is taking place across all of their product lines for all markets, they will achieve the goals at different times. Their target is to reach the WHO dietary guidelines on salt by the end of 2010. This is challenging, but possible. Unilever's experience is that stealth marketing works because people tend not to want to buy 'reduced' products. Taste adaptation is only effective if efforts are industry wide and breakthrough technologies are needed to cut salt beyond 20-30%. Scientific research on the functioning of taste and smell receptors is being used to understand the interaction and identify how a tasty flavour can be maintained during reformulation. A total of 9,100 tonnes of salt have been removed from food products without affecting taste or costs. Approximately 44% of Unilever's portfolio has undergone reformulation for a variety of reasons. The reason why the 2015 targets may seem less ambitious compared with 2010, is that across their 30,000 products the first steps that could be taken were fairly easy, i.e. 2010 targets, but the next steps are harder and hence the more modest 2015 targets.

Unilever was asked if the market is being tested to see if all socio-economic groups are buying the new products and whether any research on consumer resistance had been carried out. Unilever noted that the starting points for various food brands are different, but the targets are global. It is unclear if data is available on what products are bought by which socio-economic groups but Unilever products are purchased by all spectrums of consumers. A high-end product called 'go organic' reduced sodium by 50% and lost some consumers, indicating that if you go too far too fast, you can even lose health-seeking consumers.

The representative of the Dutch government welcomed these efforts, but noted that at national level, Unilever has not welcomed the engagement of the Ministry of Health in discussions on reformulation.

**"Healthy fat management in confectionery products" - Ms Sylvie Chartron, Public Affairs, Health and Nutrition Europe, Mars**

Their goal is to reduce the Saturated Fat (SFA) and Trans Fatty Acids (TFA) in chocolate bars. These fats are extremely useful for food manufacturing because they are solid at room temperature. So the challenge is to get an oil to behave like a fat and not to change the pleasurable chocolate taste. TFA was cut by replacing palm oil with palm oil fractions, which was done without public communication. The TFA reduction programme was completed in 2004. SFA was cut by 30% compared to a competitive set of products in the same category by replacing palm oil with sunflower oil. SFA reduction will also bring new products onto the market in 2010. This has been achieved by a multi-disciplinary team involving many departments. It has taken 40,000 hours of research and development, 10 million EURO and 5 years of work.

The three biggest confectionery factories in the UK, Netherlands and France will make the reformulated products available in the summer 2010 for the domestic and export markets. Other factories will use this experience to reconfigure their production processes. These chocolate bars will have the same branding, but will bear a nutrition claim that will depend on the local market. In France, they have branded it as '100% cocoa butter'. For countries that want to have a nutritional claim it will be a '30% less fat' claim. Even if the calorific value of the chocolate bar is the same, the quality of the fat content has been dramatically improved.
The public communication of these changes was discussed. Mars feels it can communicate to consumers that these products are now healthier choices within their food categories. However, some Platform members stated that this could be misleading for consumers. Several NGOs noted that the overall objective is a healthier diet, and if people are unknowingly buying a reformulated product then the objective has been achieved. Specific communication about the reformulation is unnecessary because of the risk that it might encourage some people to buy this chocolate who might otherwise not. Furthermore, if the reformulation is part of a government led, cross-industry initiative, then all of the products in the chocolate category are improved so there is no need to communicate.

The Commission acknowledged this tension between companies that want to be able to tell consumers about their efforts and gain market share and NGOs that are concerned about mixed messages for consumers about what foods are healthy and why. This debate highlights that public communication needs to be discussed in more detail by the Platform in the future. In addition, it would be useful to explore in more depth how the reformulation commitments by the Platform fit into the wider context of reformulation frameworks of the Member States.

4.2. OTHER INITIATIVES

• "Breakfast is Best" campaign – Dr Vincenzo Costigliola, BiB Member

Breakfast is Best (BiB) is a health-based, nutrition education campaign, launched in September 2008 in the European Parliament. It is based on the research evidence that skipping breakfast has an impact on obesity. Although this message is quite well known, it is not acted upon. Most nutrition campaigns focus on the big messages of eating less salt, fat or sugar and increasing fruit and vegetables consumption, but breakfast is rarely mentioned. Eating breakfast helps to regulate blood sugar levels and can provide the essential fluids and nutrients for the day. People who skip breakfast end up fasting for approximately 16 hours and then eating two meals in an 8 hour period. The BiB campaign has produced information materials and held events. The focus of its efforts is policy-makers rather than consumers. With an increase in resources and political support, the campaign could be rolled out much further.

Platform members commented that it was not clear from the campaign that the message should be that a healthy breakfast is important. The salt/sugar content of many breakfast cereals has been highly criticised. If breakfast schemes in school are being promoted, this is the opportunity to get a very healthy content and not sugary cereals. BiB responded that people first need to be convinced to eat breakfast, and then one can discuss what to eat. In addition, what is considered a healthy breakfast varies with regional cultures and ingredients. There was consensus that breakfast is an important part of a healthy eating pattern, but the Commission noted that there needs to be further discussion of what is eaten at breakfast.
Reformulation efforts by the UK Food Standards Agency (FSA) – Ms Alette Addison, Head of the Salt Reduction Branch at the Food Standards Agency, UK.

The FSA has worked to create a flexible framework to create opportunities for the retailing, catering and manufacturing sectors to make commitments for action. All of the largest food sector companies are involved, and the commitments are public. A new focus is on nutrition information, particularly calorie labelling for food eaten outside the home in the catering sector. A test by 21 companies in 450 catering outlets showed that it was fairly easy for companies to provide the information, and if it is clear and easy to find, consumers said they used the calorie information to help make choices within categories.

A key learning from the salt reduction campaign, is the need to get all of the companies from a sector on board. The FSA is supporting small and medium sized enterprises with targeted advice for specific sectors, e.g. fish and chip shops. A popular tool is the 'top tips' list of cost-saving or cost-neutral simple practical changes that can produce healthier food. The saturated fat campaign has a different approach from the salt campaign. The FSA has explored what has been achieved by different companies, introducing smaller portions and getting companies to devote a proportion of marketing spending to healthier products.

The FSA has run four awareness campaigns for consumers about salt reduction. On fat, there was a higher level of public knowledge on the dangers of saturated fat, so the FSA moved quickly to stage two of the campaign on what consumers can do to reduce consumption.

The results of salt reformulation are clear, there has been an overall 33% reduction in bread since the 1980s, 49% cut in breakfast cereals, 29-55% in cakes, biscuits, crisps and snacks, around 30% of soups and sauces, and some processed cheese. Retailers have made good progress; they have hit most of the 2010 targets in 85 product categories. The impact of the consumer awareness can also be measured, with larger proportions of people claiming that they are cutting down on salt and saturated fats, reading food labels. Average daily salt consumption has dropped by 0.9g between 2001 and 2009. The next measurement point will be the end of 2011.

The UK government has invested 15-16 million pounds to the awareness campaigns and set the goals, time frame and objectives for the reformulation efforts. The food industry has paid the costs of the reformulation. The FSA notes that some companies have stated that they cannot make further reformulations unless other producers change their food items. These tend to be imported products so the FSA is actively working at EU and WHO level to ensure that salt reduction efforts take place in many jurisdictions.

The importance of the government leadership role was emphasized. The Transatlantic Consumer Dialogue (TACD) has recently focused on new initiatives such as legislation requiring fast food companies to label the calorie content of their menus. The Commission noted that there will be a joint conference with the US administration in 2011 for exchange of good practice on nutrition and particularly childhood obesity.

There may be a need for greater research on consumer views of silent/stealth reformulation. Telling consumers that a product has 'less' of some nutrient can lead to lower sales. On a category by category basis, we need some research on what is the best way to reformulate - publicly or silently.
5. AOB

The Commission informed the Platform that the HLG has requested the Commission to explore different scenarios for taking forward a reformulation framework for other nutrients such as fat and sugar. The Commission invited the Platform members to share their views and experiences to support this work.

The minutes of the last meeting were accepted with one minor correction submitted by the European Heart Network.

Comments on the draft monitoring report should be sent by close of business on Thursday 6 May, after which the report will be uploaded on SANCO website by the next Platform meeting (1 July 2010).

Agenda items for the next meeting:

- The draft Platform evaluation report: On 25 June the report will be given to the Platform on a confidential basis - not for further dissemination. After the Platform members have provided feedback, the final version of the evaluation report will be published.
- Any concrete ideas and proposals on how to improve the monitoring process are welcome.
- The Platform is invited to have an open discussion on how to organise the afternoon debates from September onwards. Ideas could be proposed on the format of the meetings and the working papers etc. The overall goal is to improve the efficiency and efficacy of the meetings, ensuring a good use of time and lively exchanges.
- For specific ideas on presentations that could be made at the next meeting, proposals should be submitted by 15 May 2010.
- The vision for the future of the Platform should be on the agenda for the September meeting.