

SUSTAINABILITY AND PUBLIC HEALTH NUTRITION: INNOVATION & TRANSFORMATION IN FMCG SECTOR WITH REFERENCE TO UNILEVER AND NESTLE

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ABSTRACT

The relationship between sustainability and public health nutrition is becoming increasingly evident in the context of global food systems. Sustainable food production, innovation, and public health policies can create a more integrative approach to public health nutrition. The focus is on how large fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) companies, in collaboration with government sectors, can promote both sustainable practices and nutritional well-being. Case studies from companies like Unilever and Nestlé, and their partnerships with public health agencies, highlight innovative strategies for addressing food security, nutritional deficiencies, and sustainability challenges. The paper examines barriers to these initiatives, evaluates the outcomes of such collaborations, and suggests ways forward in aligning sustainability and public health nutrition through innovation.

Keywords: Health Nutrition, FMCG Sector, Sustainability, Innovation, Case Studies.

Introduction

The current global food system faces significant challenges, including climate change, environmental degradation, and public health issues such as malnutrition and diet-related diseases [1]. The concept of sustainability in the food sector emphasises the need to develop systems that provide nutritious, safe, and affordable food while minimising environmental impacts and supporting social well-being [2]. This paper focuses on the intersection of sustainability and well-being in public health nutrition, particularly how FMCG companies and government sectors are working together to drive innovation and transformation [3].

Sustainability in food systems is essential not only for environmental conservation but also for ensuring long-term public health outcomes. By promoting sustainable food practices, companies and governments can tackle issues such as food security, obesity, and chronic diseases, which have become major public health concerns. This research aims to explore how sustainable food practices and public health nutrition can be integrated into a holistic model that addresses both ecological and human well-being.

Purpose

The purpose of this research is to:

- Explore the role of sustainability in promoting public health nutrition.
- Identify how FMCG companies and government sectors collaborate to enhance food security, nutritional health, and environmental sustainability.

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- Analyze case studies of innovative practices in food production, distribution, and consumption that promote sustainability and well-being.
- Examine barriers and challenges in implementing sustainable food systems that align with public health nutrition goals.
- Provide recommendations for creating more integrative and transformative food policies and practices that connect sustainability with public health nutrition.

Objectives

- To explore the role of sustainability in the food system as a key determinant of public health outcomes.
- To examine the collaborations between FMCG companies and public health sectors in promoting integrative public health nutrition strategies.
- To analyze innovations in food production and policy that contribute to both sustainability and well-being.
- To identify barriers and challenges faced by both private and public sectors in achieving sustainable public health nutrition.
- To provide actionable recommendations for improving the sustainability and nutritional value of global food systems.

Methodology

This research employs a qualitative approach, focusing on secondary data sources including academic literature, corporate sustainability reports, and public health policy documents. A case study methodology is also used to analyze specific examples of collaboration between FMCG companies and government bodies in promoting sustainable public health nutrition. The research process involved the following steps:

- **Data Collection:** Data was gathered from sustainability reports, policy documents, and academic studies on public health nutrition and sustainability in the food sector.
- **Case Study Analysis:** The research analyses two primary case studies—**Unilever and Nestlé**—highlighting their role in promoting public health nutrition through sustainable practices.
- **Literature Review:** A review of academic literature on the relationship between sustainability, food systems, and public health was conducted.
- **Thematic Analysis:** A thematic analysis was conducted to identify key trends and challenges in the integration of sustainability and public health nutrition.

Discussion

Sustainability and Public Health Nutrition: A Convergence

The convergence of sustainability and public health nutrition involves recognizing that food systems must be both environmentally sustainable and health-promoting. Sustainable diets are those that have a low environmental impact while contributing to health outcomes such as reducing obesity, cardiovascular disease, and malnutrition. The global food system currently contributes to significant environmental damage, including deforestation, greenhouse gas emissions, and biodiversity loss. At the same time, the system fails to address critical public health issues like food insecurity, malnutrition, and the growing burden of diet-related chronic diseases [1].

Innovative approaches to public health nutrition often involve reducing the environmental impact of food production while ensuring that populations have access to nutritious food. This dual focus is seen in collaborations between the public and private sectors, particularly in partnerships between FMCG companies and governments aimed at promoting healthy, sustainable diets [2].

Case Study 1: Unilever's Sustainable Living Plan

Unilever's Sustainable Living Plan is a comprehensive strategy aimed at improving health and well-being while reducing environmental impact. One of the key components of the plan is its focus on nutrition, with initiatives designed to reduce salt, sugar, and fat content in its food products. Unilever has also committed to sourcing 100% of its agricultural raw materials sustainably, which supports both environmental goals and food security in agricultural communities [3].

Unilever's collaboration with public health organizations has been instrumental in promoting healthier food choices. For example, the company partnered with the World Food Programme to improve nutrition in developing countries by fortifying food products with essential nutrients. Through such initiatives, Unilever has demonstrated the potential of large FMCG companies to contribute to both sustainability and public health goals [3].

- **Case Study 2: Nestlé's Nutritional and Environmental Commitments**

Nestlé has long been a leader in integrating nutrition with sustainability. The company's Creating Shared Value (CSV) approach emphasizes that its business success is directly linked to the health and sustainability of the communities it serves. Nestlé has committed to reducing greenhouse gas emissions, achieving zero waste in its operations, and improving the nutritional quality of its products by reducing salt, sugar, and fat [4].

In collaboration with the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, Nestlé has implemented projects that improve agricultural practices while addressing public health nutrition. One such project is the Nestlé Healthy Kids Global Programme, which educates children and parents about healthy eating and sustainability. This program illustrates how FMCG companies can align public health goals with environmental sustainability through education and innovation [4].

Findings

The research findings indicate that there is significant potential for FMCG companies to play a critical role in promoting public health nutrition through sustainable practices. However, these efforts are often limited by the scale of operations and the complexity of global supply chains. Key findings include:

- **Economic Benefits:** Sustainable food practices can reduce operational costs in the long term by promoting resource efficiency and reducing waste [1].
- **Health Improvements:** Reformulating food products to reduce salt, sugar, and fat content has had a measurable impact on public health, particularly in reducing diet-related diseases.
- **Environmental Impact:** Sustainable sourcing and waste reduction initiatives contribute to lower greenhouse gas emissions and improved resource management.
- **Barriers:** High costs of implementation, consumer resistance to change, and the complexity of supply chains are major barriers to achieving integrated sustainability and public health nutrition goals.

Literature Review

- **The Role of Sustainability in Public Health Nutrition**

Sustainable food systems are essential for both ecological balance and human health. Research by Fanzo et al. (2018) [1] highlights that climate change threatens food security and public nutrition, increasing malnutrition risks. According to Tilman & Clark (2014) [2], adopting sustainable diets—such as plant-based eating—reduces greenhouse gas emissions and improves long-term health.

The World Health Organization (2020) [5] emphasizes the link between diet and chronic diseases. Nutrient-deficient diets contribute to obesity, diabetes, and cardiovascular conditions. Therefore, integrating sustainability into nutrition policies ensures food security while reducing environmental harm.

- **Corporate Innovation in Food Sustainability**

Large FMCG corporations play a crucial role in developing sustainable food systems. Unilever's Sustainable Living Plan aims to improve nutrition by reducing salt, sugar, and fat in processed foods [3]. Similarly, Nestlé's Creating Shared Value (CSV) model promotes sustainable agriculture and healthy eating habits [4].

Studies show that corporate-led sustainability initiatives have a direct impact on public health. For example, reformulating food products to include healthier ingredients has led to a decrease in diet-related illnesses [5]. However, [6]Davis & Lopez (2021) argue that such measures require strong regulatory support and consumer acceptance to be effective.

- **Sustainable Sourcing and Food Security**

Food security depends on ethical and sustainable sourcing. Nestlé has committed to 100% responsibly sourced ingredients, reducing deforestation and promoting sustainable farming [4]. Research by Fanzo et al. (2018) [1] supports the role of agro-ecological farming in improving food resilience while reducing environmental impact.

However, challenges persist. Tilman & Clark (2014) [2] note that shifting to sustainable agriculture requires significant investment in infrastructure and technology, which small-scale farmers may struggle to afford. Additionally, climate change exacerbates food supply chain vulnerabilities, affecting global food access [5].

Barriers to Sustainable Public Health Nutrition

Despite progress, several challenges hinder the full integration of sustainability in food systems:

- **High Costs:** Sustainable production methods require financial investment in renewable energy, eco-friendly packaging, and ethical labor practices [6].
- **Consumer Resistance:** While demand for healthy foods is growing, many consumers prioritize affordability over sustainability [5].
- **Supply Chain Complexity:** Ensuring traceability and compliance across international food supply chains remains difficult [2].

Practical Barriers

Despite the positive outcomes of integrating sustainability and public health nutrition, there are several challenges:

- **High Costs:** Implementing sustainable practices in food production and distribution often requires significant upfront investment, which may be prohibitive for smaller companies.
- **Consumer Resistance:** While there is increasing consumer demand for healthier, more sustainable products, there is also resistance to change, particularly when it comes to altering dietary habits.
- **Complex Supply Chains:** The global nature of food supply chains makes it difficult to ensure sustainability across all levels, from raw material sourcing to product distribution.

Conclusion

Sustainability and public health nutrition are inextricably linked, and addressing the challenges of global food systems requires a coordinated approach between the private and public sectors. FMCG companies, through innovative practices and collaborations with government agencies, can play a significant role in promoting healthier diets and more sustainable food systems. However, achieving these goals requires overcoming barriers related to cost, consumer behaviour, and supply chain complexity. By continuing to invest in sustainable practices and public health initiatives, companies can contribute to a healthier and more sustainable future.

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