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Connecting the dots

Food systems and nutrition at the intersection of geopolitics and commercial determinants of health

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Why are we here?

- Diet is a top contributor to health outcomes everywhere
 - No health transformation without food systems transformation
- Case studies from nutrition, food systems and agriculture offer insights on how geopolitics, commercial determinants and equity play out and intersect over time

Breastfeeding: crucially important, but increasingly challenged in a market-driven world

Reframing 'normal' as problematic is a key marketing strategy

- New parents may be concerned about maturing baby behaviours
- CMF marketing frames normal maturing behaviours as 'something is wrong' – pathological – or mothers are inadequate
 - "If you are not sure whether you have enough milk..."
 - "If your infant has a rash or cries or possets or is unsettled... maybe they have an allergy"and offer products as **solutions**
- "Selling peace of mind" ... certainty of quantity of milk consumed

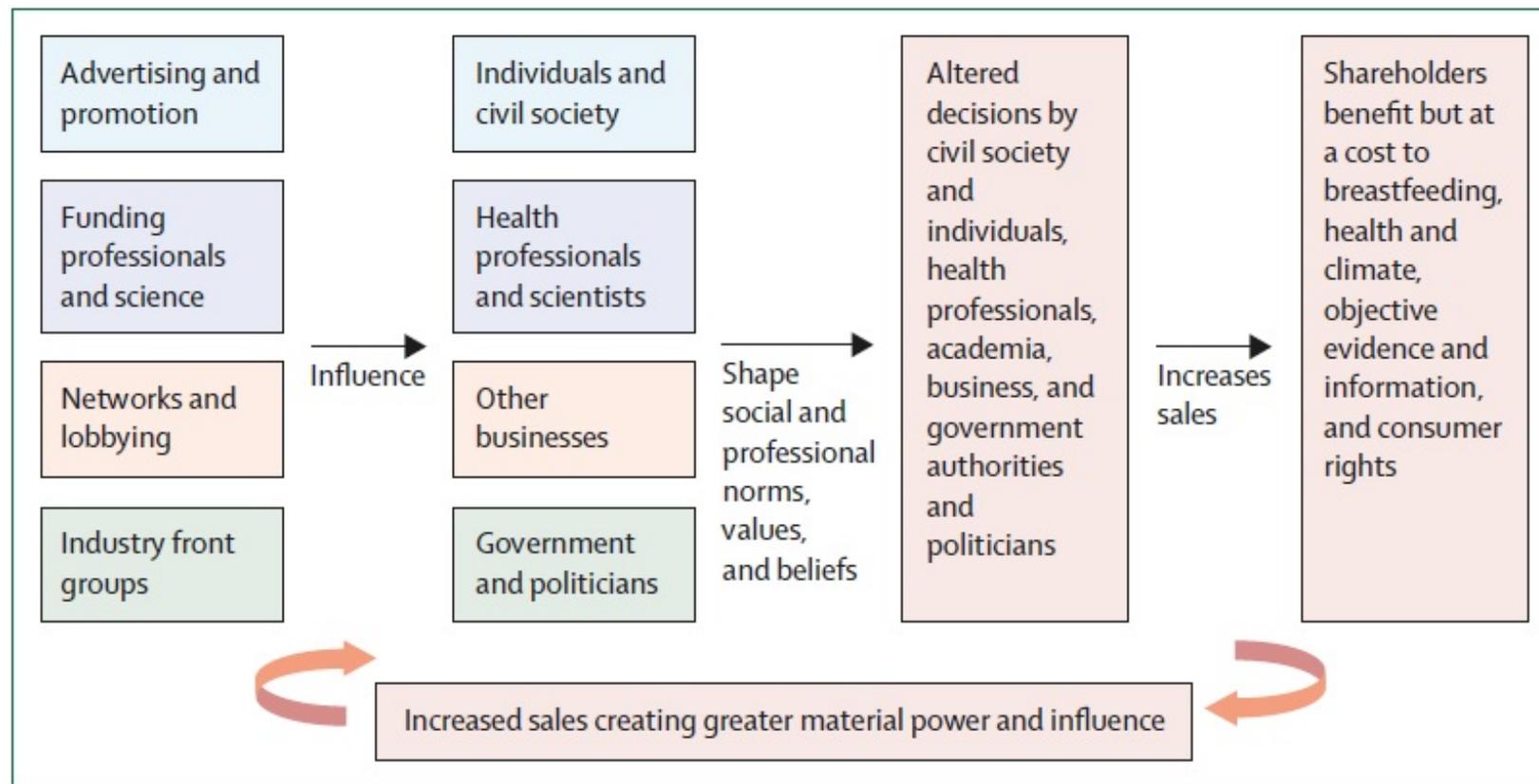


Pérez-Escamilla et al. *Lancet* 2022

Marketing of commercial milk formula: a system to capture parents, communities, science, and policy

- Multi-faceted
- Sophisticated
- Agile
- Well-resourced (powerful)
- Sustained
- Self-reinforcing

Resourced to turn the birth of an infant and the care of parents into a business opportunity...



Rollins et al. *Lancet* 2022

DIVERSE BODIES OF RESEARCH DEMONSTRATE THE INTERPLAY OF COMMERCIAL INTERESTS, TRADE, LOBBYING AND MONEY

The CMF industry, markets and food systems

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DOI: 10.1111/mcn.13097

ORIGINAL ARTICLE | Maternal & Child Nutrition | WILEY

First-food systems transformations and the ultra-processing of infant and young child diets: The determinants, dynamics and consequences of the global rise in commercial milk formula

PHILIP JULIE DAVID

Globalization, first-foods systems transformations and corporate power: a synthesis of market and transnational food industry and public health resistance in the Philippines

PHILIP JULIE DAVID, GILIAN RUSSELL, KATHERINE SEVERN, PAUL ZAMBRAÑO, ROGER MATHIAS, MARIA ROSARIO SINGH-VERGINE, ANA EFELANIA ESCOBAR, MELISSA MALON, MARK LAWRENCE, KATHERINE SEVERN, CHELIE RUSSELL, and DAVID MCCOY

Abstract
Background: The aggressive marketing of breastmilk substitutes (BMS) reduces breastfeeding, and harms child and maternal health globally. Yet forty years after the World Health Assembly adopted the International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes (The Code), many countries are still to fully implement its provisions into national law. Furthermore, despite The Code, commercial milk formula (CMF) markets have markedly expanded. In this paper, we adopt the Philippines as a case study to understand the battle for national Code implementation. In particular, we investigate the market and political strategies used by the baby food industry to shape the country's 'first food system', and in doing so, promote and sustain CMF consumption. We further investigate how breastfeeding coalitions and advocates have resisted these strategies, and generated political commitment for a world-leading breastfeeding policy framework and protection law (the 'Milk Code'). We used a case study design and process tracing method, drawing from documentary and interview data.
Results: The decline in breastfeeding in the Philippines in the mid-twentieth Century associated with intensive BMS marketing via health systems and consumer advertising. As regulations tightened, the industry more aggressively promoted CMF for older infants and young children, thereby 'marketing around' the Milk Code. It established food groups to implement political strategies intended to weaken the country's breastfeeding policy framework while also fostering a favourable image. This included lobbying government officials and international organisations, emphasising its economic importance and threats to foreign investment and trade, direct litigation against the government, messaging that framed marketing in terms of women's choice and empowerment, and forging partnerships. A resurgence in breastfeeding from the mid-1980s onwards reflected strengthening political commitment for a national breastfeeding policy framework and Milk Code, resulting in turn from collective actions by breastfeeding coalitions, advocates and mothers.

Trade policy, regulation and Corporate lobbying

http://jghpm.com | Int J Health Policy Manag 2021, x(x), 1–15 | doi: 10.34172/ijhpm.2021.109

JHPM | Original Article

What You Don't Know About the Codex Can Hurt You: How Trade Policy Trumps Global Health Governance in Infant and Young Child Nutrition

KATHERY ZAHID, MONIQUE BO BAKER, KATHERY N. RUSSELL, PHILLIP BAKER, MANHO KANG, and DAVID MCCOY

Abstract
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Environmental impacts

International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health | MDPI

Review

Examining the Environmental Impacts of the Dairy and Baby Food Industries: Are First-Food Systems a Crucial Missing Part of the Healthy and Sustainable Food Systems Agenda Now Underway?

Daniel H. Pope^{1,†}, Johan O. Karlsson^{2,†}, Phillip Baker^{3,4,†} and David McCoy⁵

Abstract
Food systems are increasingly being understood as driving various crises and their transformation is recognised as a key opportunity for public health. However, the environmental impacts of food systems represent an underdeveloped aspect of this transformation. Despite the optimal source of infant nutrition, use of commercial milk formula (CMF) represents an underdeveloped aspect of this transformation. Despite the optimal source of infant nutrition, use of commercial milk formula (CMF) represents an underdeveloped aspect of this transformation. Despite the optimal source of infant nutrition, use of commercial milk formula (CMF) represents an underdeveloped aspect of this transformation. Despite the optimal source of infant nutrition, use of commercial milk formula (CMF) represents an underdeveloped aspect of this transformation.

Economic impacts

TWN Third World Network | DEAKIN UNIVERSITY | UNU-HIGH

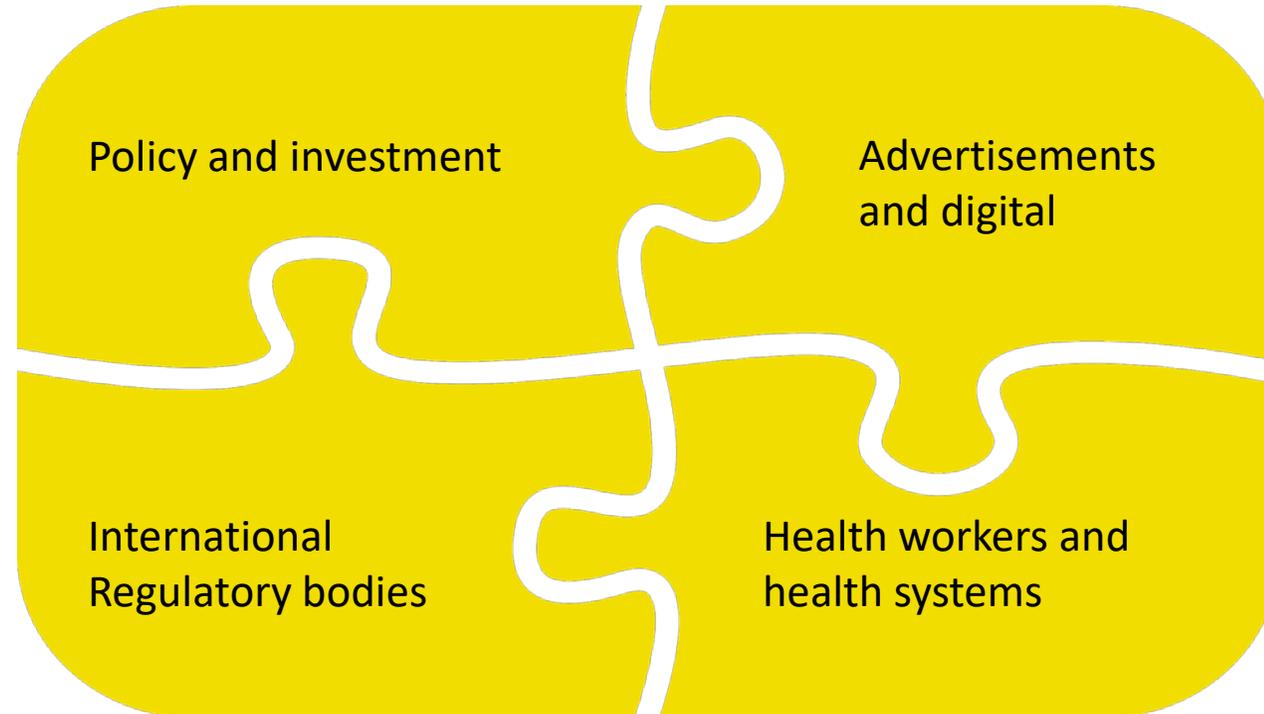
Who benefits from undermining breastfeeding?
Exploring the global commercial milk formula industry's generation and distribution of wealth and income



Baker et al. *Lancet* 2022

WHERE DOES GEO-POLITICS FIT IN?

A comprehensive understanding of marketing tactics highlights where and how geopolitical interests play out



Rollins et al. *Lancet* 2022

Food and agriculture: Many political economy challenges to policy reform necessary to deliver multiple outcomes from food systems

Internal competing interests

Food systems are not only about food

Political landscapes changing



Sugar tax....



US farmers lobby for climate action and racial justice in 2023 Farm Bill



European farmers feel targeted as climate culprits



...or sugar jobs?



Kenyan farmers advocate for food sovereignty, feminism, & ending GBV

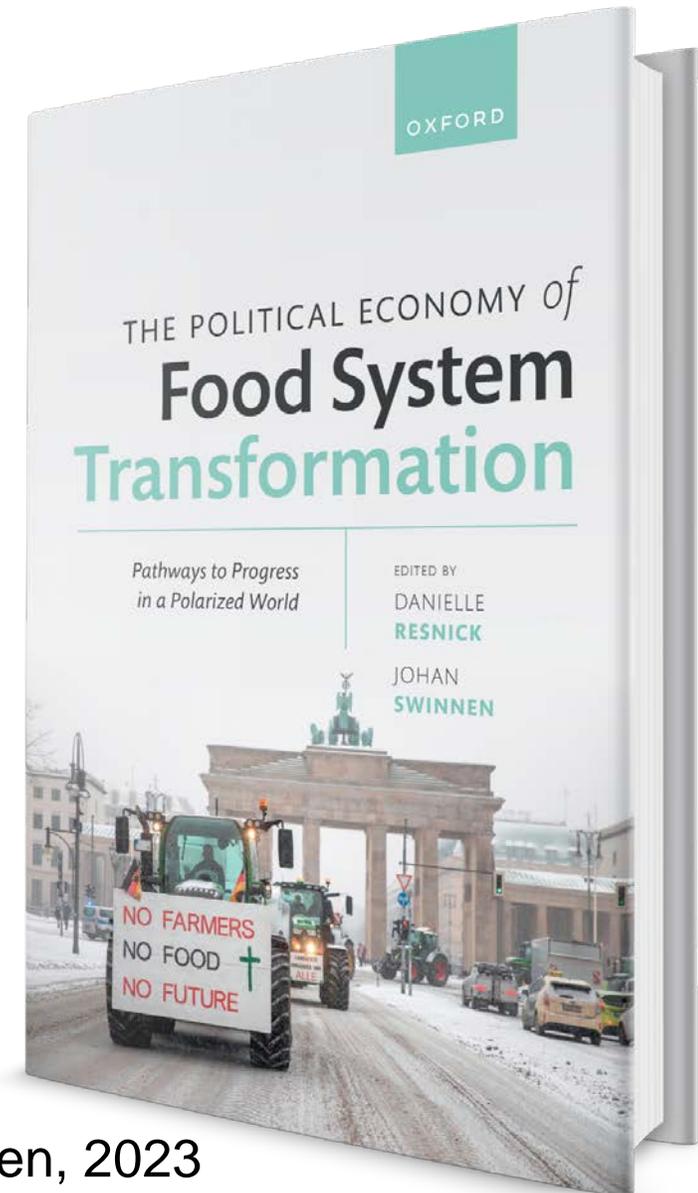


Dutch concerns resonate in Canada



A (Geo) Political Economy Lens is Critical to Transform Food Systems

- The ability to reconcile trade-offs depends on whether there is **conflict among interests or values and ideas**
- **Coalitions are essential** but can **fracture, calcify, or transform** in unexpected ways
- **Divergent preferences can be reconciled** through strategic policy design and savvy framing that appeal to multiple stakeholders simultaneously
- Adaptation and implementation requires **matching policy instruments with capacities and institutional settings**, and **avoiding “isomorphic mimicry”**
- **Food superheroes versus villains** dichotomies impede progress on reforms

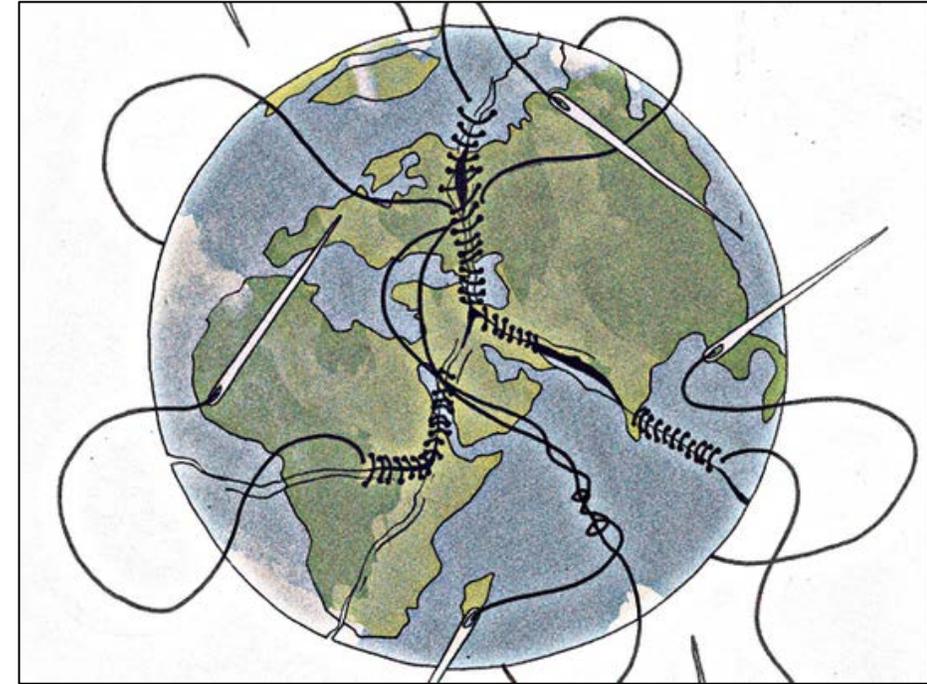


Resnick & Swinnen, 2023

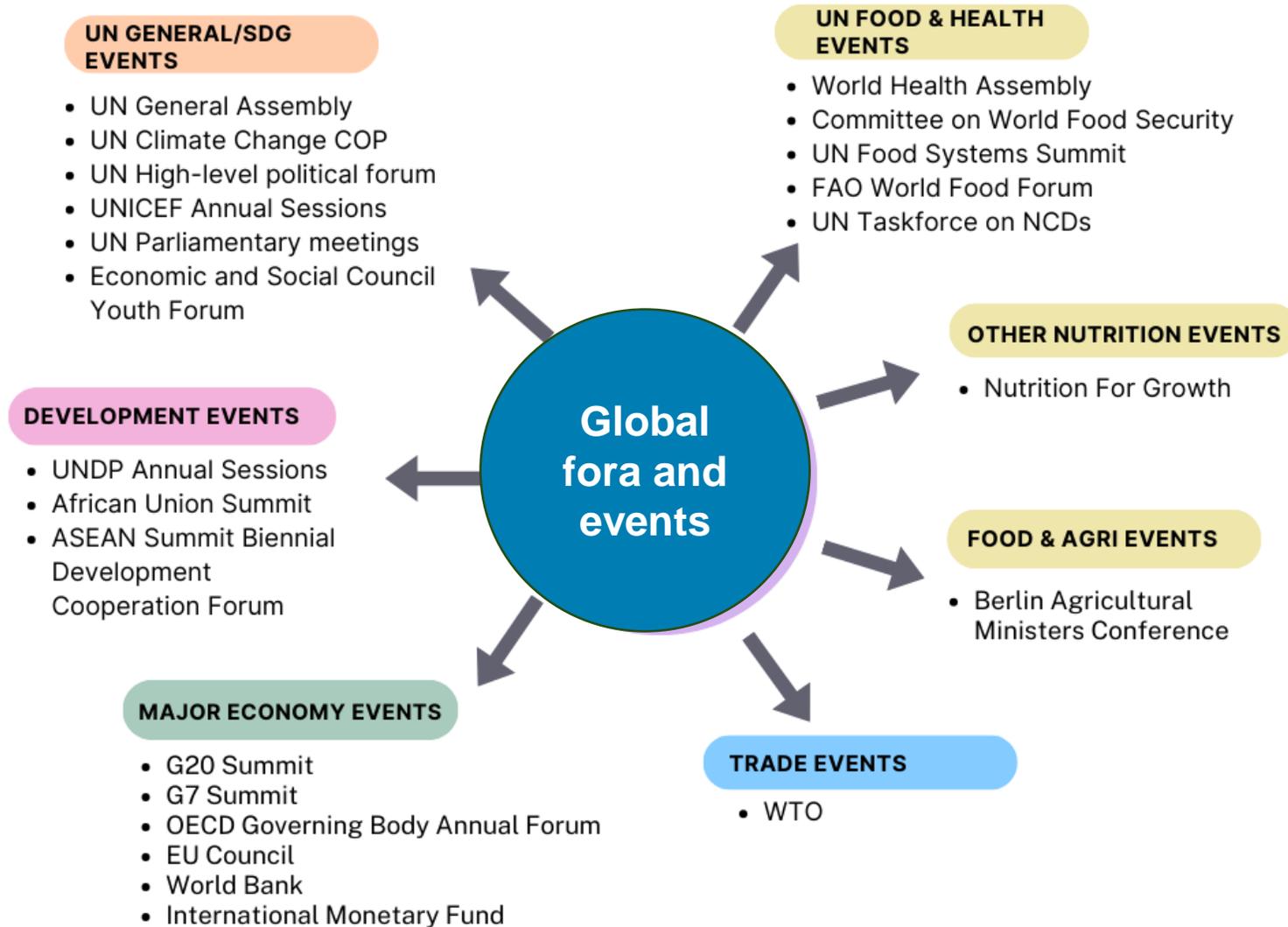


Globally and regionally: Crisis of multilateralism and growth of multi-stakeholderism raise new geopolitical considerations

- Consensus decisions more fraught in multilateral bodies with different pressures to transform them
- Intergovernmental decision-making, including on agriculture, clustering into regional and economic groups
- Growing emphasis on stakeholder participation that does not obligate intergovernmental commitments or accountability



Diverse global fora have discussed SDG2 since 2015, but...



- >20 global events where SDG 2 has been discussed since 2015
- >50% are UN events
- Events are mostly annual
- >100 commitment/decision documents analyzed against a framework for scaling up impact
- **Global commitments to act have not matched commitments to specific actions, financing or accountability**

Zorbas et al, 2024 (forthcoming)

Key messages

- No health transformation without food systems transformation
- Case studies from food, agriculture and nutrition offer strong examples of how geopolitics and commercial determinants [and equity!] play out and intersect over time
 - *Long history of breastfeeding and commercial milk formula*
- Global efforts need to change fast to be fit-for-the-future and truly public good oriented in impact
- Political economy and within that, the role of geopolitics, is a key consideration and needs much more attention in research and policymaking at all levels