Unilever Nutrition Strategy and Examples in Asia

Karen Cunningham, Kom Kamonpatana*, Jason Bao, Joy Ramos-Buenviaje, Andriyani Wagtianto and Pau-wei Yeap

Unilever

Summary

Millions of people in Asia are facing challenges from undernutrition, obesity, and diet-related non-communicable diseases. Unilever, as a global food business, has a simple approach to nutrition strategy: ‘better products’ help people to enjoy ‘better diets’ and live ‘better lives.’ For ‘Better Products,’ Unilever strives to improve the taste and nutritional qualities of all our products. By 2020, we commit to double the proportion of our entire global portfolio meeting the highest nutrition standards, based on globally recognised dietary guidelines. Unilever sets a clear plan to achieve reduction of sodium, saturated fat, trans fat, sugar, and calories in our products. Unilever developed fortified seasoning and spread products in 2013 for Vietnam, Indonesia, and the Philippines in collaboration with government bodies to address nutrient deficiencies. For ‘Better Diets and Better Lives,’ Unilever uses targeted communication to raise awareness and promote behavior change for healthy lifestyles. We committed to full nutrition labeling on our food products by 2015. We contribute experience to science-based regional initiatives on product labeling as well as nutrient profiling. Unilever collaborated with international, regional and country bodies to promote consumer understanding and food accessibility on public health priorities such as proper salt consumption, healthier meals, and employee well-being programs. Looking ahead, we are continuing to improve the nutritional profile of our products as well as our communication to improve diets and lives. Collaboration between industry, government and public health organizations is needed to address complex diet and lifestyle issues.

Key Words

Unilever, strategy, nutrition, health, Asia

Millions of people in Asia are facing challenges from undernutrition, obesity, and diet-related non-communicable diseases. Unilever, as a global food business, has a long heritage in working on nutrition with a strong commitment to helping improve the lives of millions of people. Our approach is simple: better products help people to enjoy better diets and live better lives. The approach is firmly embedded in our business and R&D strategy. We have set ambitious nutritional targets that can help hundreds of millions of people to enjoy great food and healthier diets.

Better Products in Asia

Unilever strives to improve the taste and nutritional qualities of all our products. By 2020, we commit to double the proportion of our entire global portfolio meeting the highest nutrition standards, based on globally recognised dietary guidelines. Unilever has set a clear plan to achieve reduction of salt, saturated fat, trans fat, sugar, and calories in our products. For example, all ice cream for children (under the Paddle Pop brand) contain <110 kcal per serving, <3 g saturated fat per serving, and <20 g added sugar per 100 g. As of 2012, 80% of our Foods and Refreshment portfolio meets 5 g salt equivalent per day (based on globally recognised dietary guidelines). Unilever developed fortified seasoning products with the National Institute of Nutrition (NIN), the Ministry of Health of Vietnam, and the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN) in 2013. In Indonesia and the Philippines, Unilever launched margarine fortified with six vitamins (i.e., vitamin A, B1, B2, D, E and niacin) under the brand Blue Band.

Better Diets and Better Lives in Asia

Unilever uses targeted communication to raise awareness and promote behavior change for healthy lifestyles. We committed to full nutrition labeling on our food products by 2015. We contribute experience to science-based regional initiatives on product labeling as well as nutrient profiling. Unilever collaborated with international, regional and country bodies to promote consumer understanding and food accessibility on public health priorities such as proper salt consumption, healthier meals, and employee well-being programs. Looking ahead, we are continuing to improve the nutritional profile of our products as well as our communication to improve diets and lives. Collaboration between industry, government and public health organizations is needed to address complex diet and lifestyle issues.

*To whom correspondence should be addressed. E-mail: Kom.Kamonpatana@unilever.com
Research Institute (FNRI) Unilever Food Solutions (our business supplying products to caterers and restaurant operators) in Singapore was the first partner with the Health Promotion Board in the Healthier Dining Programme to help restaurateurs to improve menu dishes to serve less than 500-kcal meals.

Unilever is working with schools and school caterers to make healthy eating practical, affordable and part of everyday day life in the Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia and Thailand. In 2011, Unilever launched the Thai School Bus project in Thailand. Endorsed by Thai school authorities and the Bureau of Nutrition, Ministry of Health, the company helps primary school teachers and food staff of 436 schools to steer children towards a healthier and more balanced diet. Software for menu planning was developed in partnership with Mahidol University to enable nutritious, appetizing meals that fit the school budget.

The Living Wellness campaign was a partnership between Unilever Philippines and Robinsons Supermarket which aims to promote wellness among shoppers. We have deployed licensed nutritionist-dietitians in stores to counsel shoppers on healthy eating as well as guide them on how to prepare healthy recipes for their families.

Lastly, we are also promoting health and wellness to our employees through the Lamplighter programme. Employees undergo health screening and education on taking care of mental health, healthy eating and a healthy lifestyle.

Looking ahead, we are continuing to improve the nutritional profile of our products as well as our communication to improve diets and lives. Collaboration among industry, government and public health organizations is needed to address complex diet and lifestyle issues.