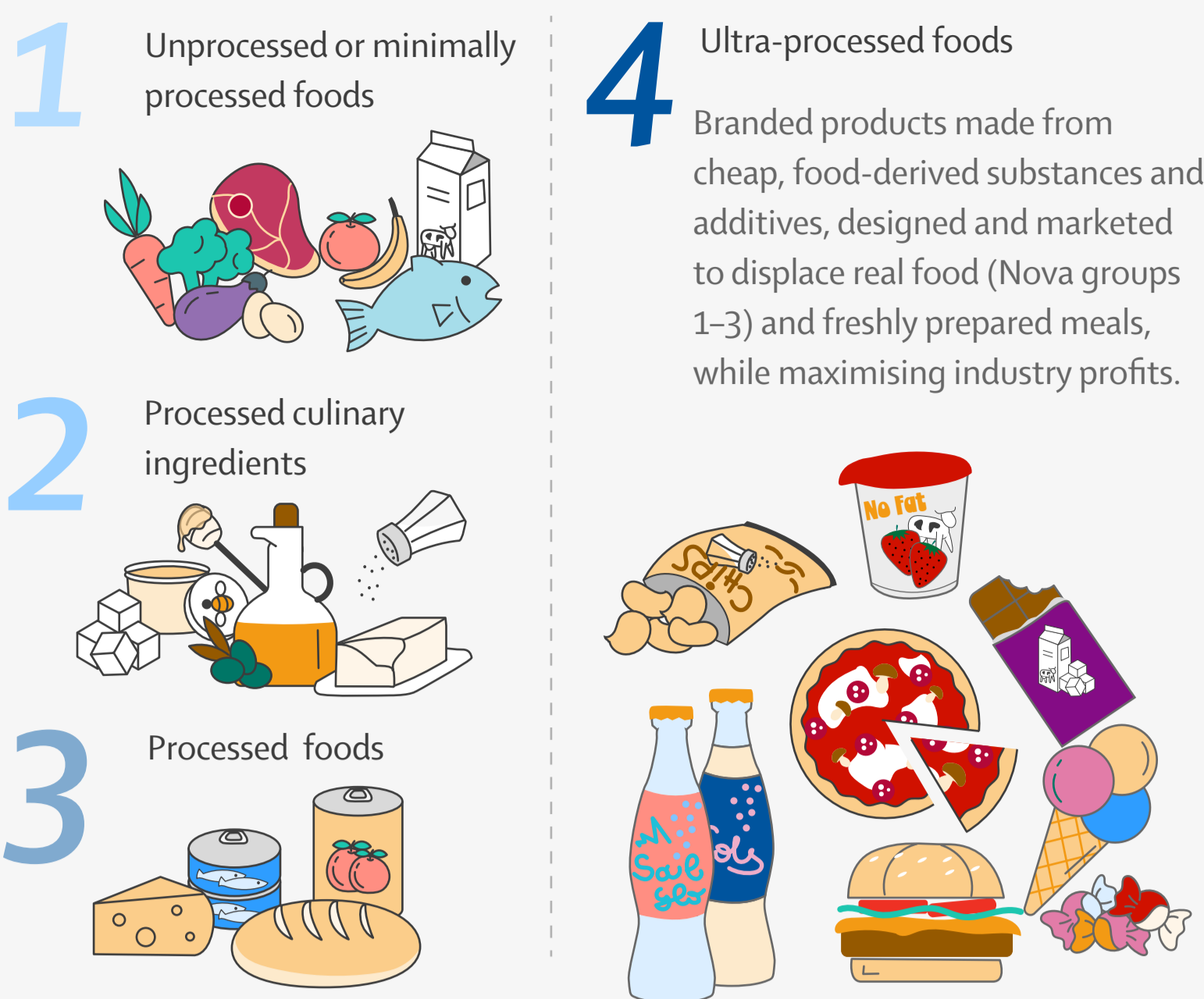


The Lancet Series on Ultra-Processed Foods and Human Health

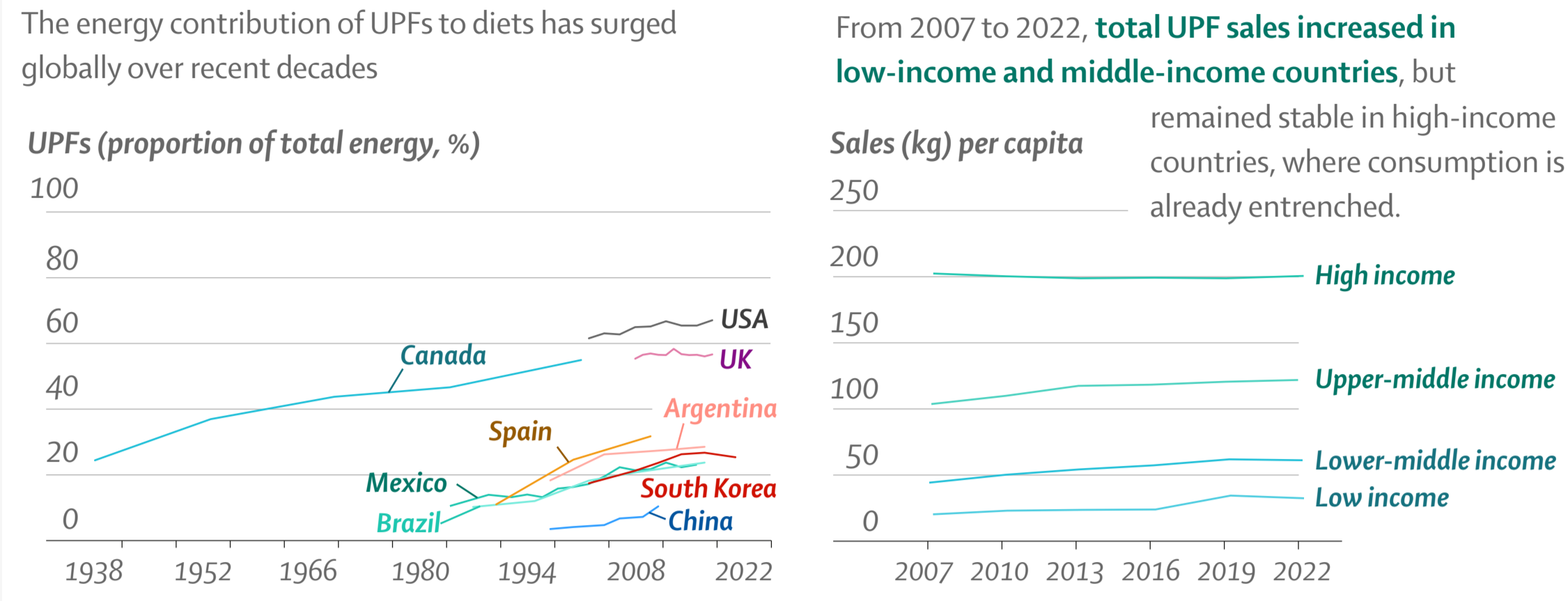
Now is the time to act on Ultra Processed Foods (UPFs) as a global health issue.

Nova: the food classification based on the extent and purpose of processing

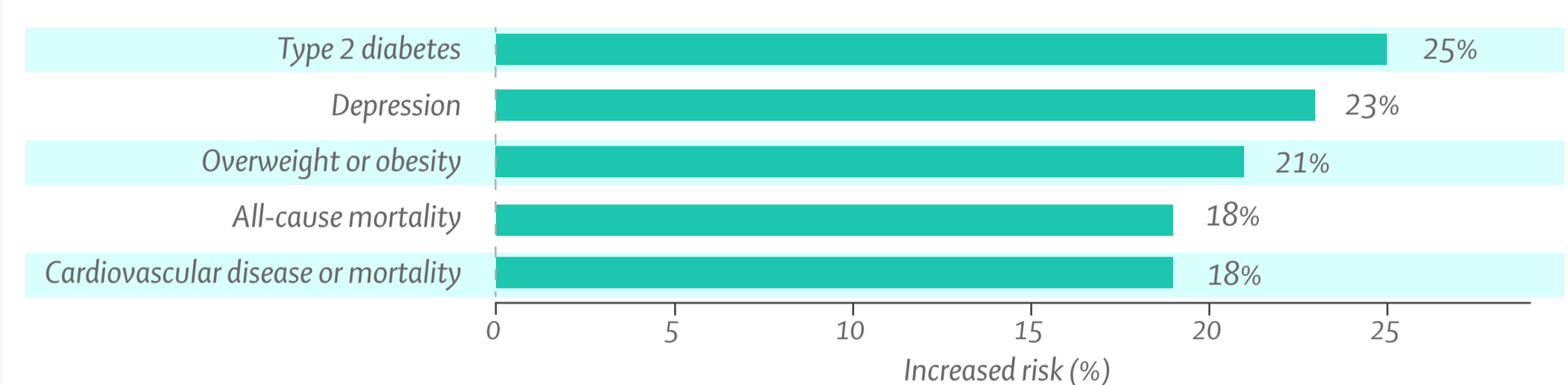


20 years ago, while studying changes in Brazil’s food supply linked to rising obesity, we realised that the purpose of food processing had shifted from preserving foods to creating profitable substitutes using cheap food substances and additives. That insight led us to create the Nova classification—with its fourth group of ultra-processed foods—to capture not just nutrients, but also the extent and purpose of food processing as a key determinant of diet quality and risk of ill health.

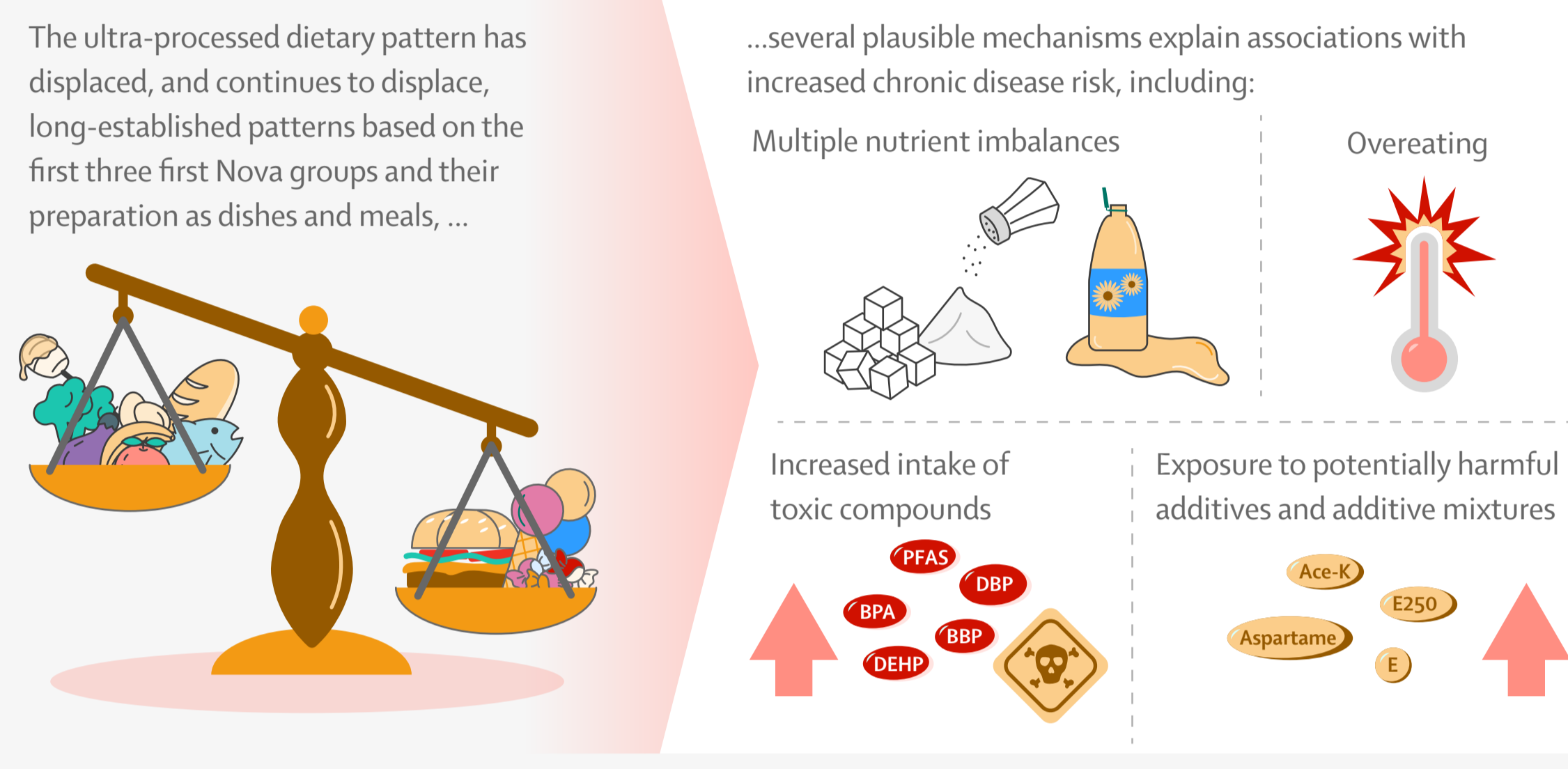
The ultra-processed dietary pattern is globally displacing diets based on Nova groups 1–3 and their preparation as dishes and meals.



Our systematic review of **104 studies** found **92** showing an association between the ultra-processed dietary pattern and increased risk of one or more chronic disease outcomes. Meta-analyses of 15 outcomes found statistically significant associations with adverse health conditions for 12, including:

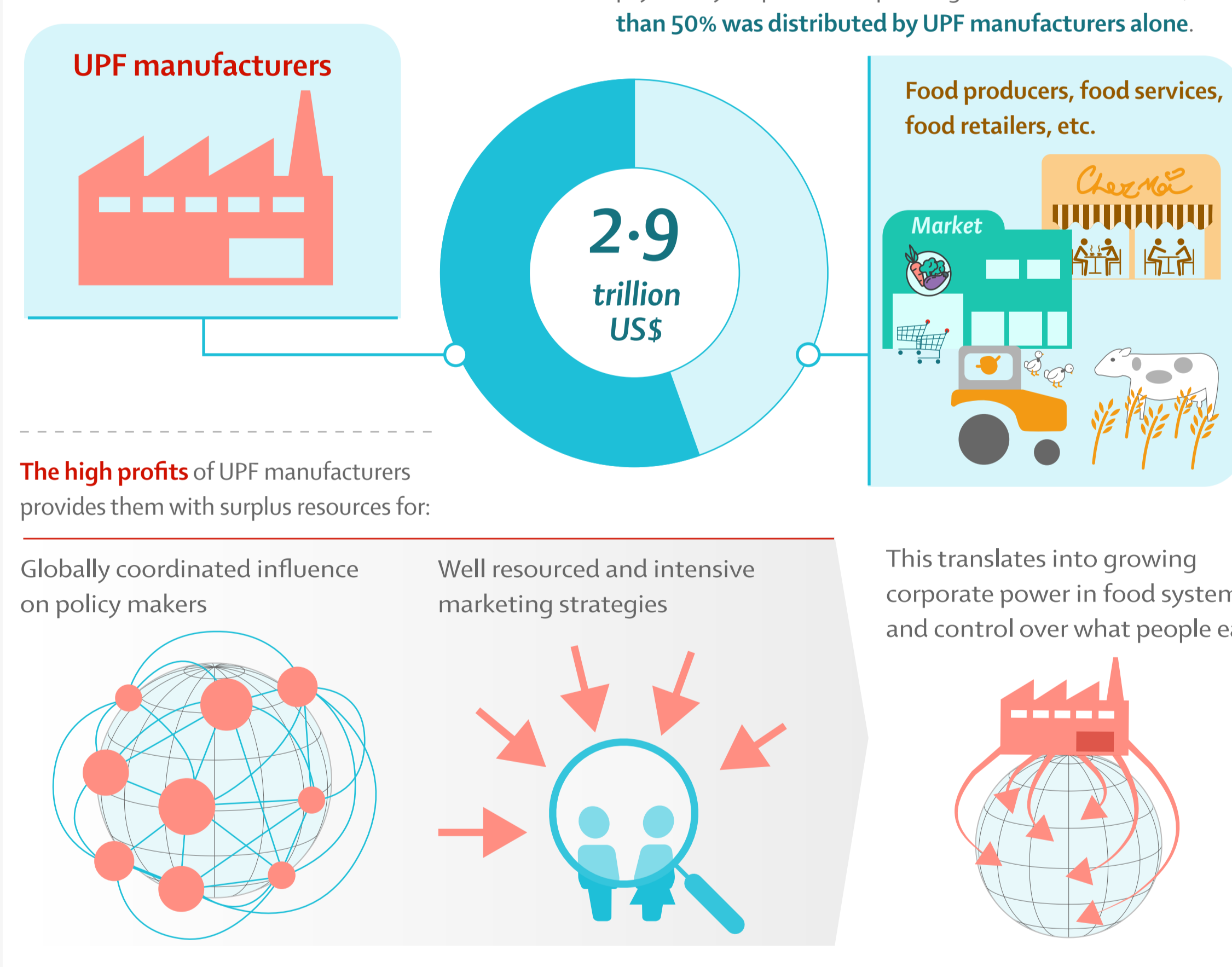


The totality of evidence shows that



Taken together, these findings support the thesis that the ultra-processed dietary pattern is a major driver of the escalating global burden of diet-related chronic diseases. Public health policies and actions are justified at all levels to preserve, protect, and promote diets based on whole foods, and their preparation as dishes and meals.

Ultra-processing is highly profitable



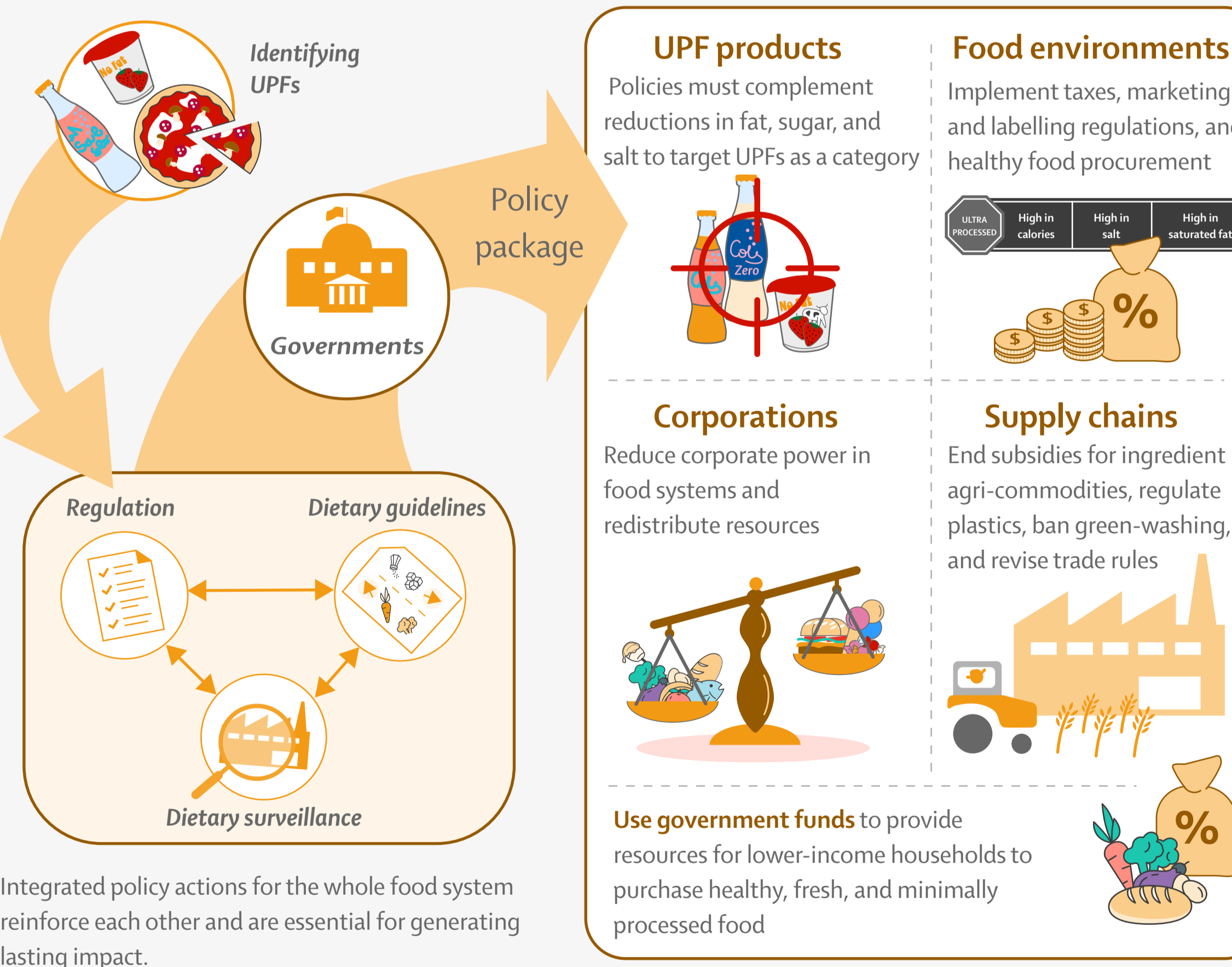
The high profits of UPF manufacturers provides them with surplus resources for:

Globally coordinated influence on policy makers

Well resourced and intensive marketing strategies

This translates into growing corporate power in food systems and control over what people eat

Improving diets cannot rely on consumer behaviour change alone—it also requires policies that regulate UPF marketing and production, confront corporate power, and reshape food systems to prioritise health, justice, and sustainability, over corporate profits.



UPF products

Policies must complement reductions in fat, sugar, and salt to target UPFs as a category

Food environments

Implement taxes, marketing and labelling regulations, and healthy food procurement

Corporations

Reduce corporate power in food systems and redistribute resources

Supply chains

End subsidies for ingredient agri-commodities, regulate plastics, ban green-washing, and revise trade rules

Use government funds to provide resources for lower-income households to purchase healthy, fresh, and minimally processed food

A global health response is urgent and feasible

- » Prioritise UPFs as a global health issue

Political action on UPFs has low priority despite the chronic disease burden; viewing them as commercially driven, like tobacco, shifts blame to corporate accountability.
- » Multilevel coalition-building

Build coalitions globally and nationally, uniting civil society, experts, government officials, UN agencies, and media to drive policy change and counter corporate power.
- » Ensure a just transition to low-UPFs diets

Policies should integrate participatory governance, economic inclusion, and household support while ensuring food security and gender equity, and avoiding stigma.
- » The recipe for collective action

Latin America and sub-Saharan Africa show how to scale: mobilise civil society, recruit political champions, and use advocacy, media, and research to drive policy change.

The Lancet Series on Ultra-Processed Foods and Human Health
The Lancet 2025; published online November 18. <https://www.thelancet.com/series-do/ultra-processed-food>.

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