

FoodTrace Consulting

<u>Team Member Name</u>	<u>Year</u>	<u>Major</u>
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Topic Title: Searching for a safe urban diet in empty ultra-processed food

Audience: Nestlé board of directors

Sustainable Development Goal

SDG #11: Sustainable cities and communities

Executive Summary

In the Americas, modern cities are not neutral food environments. They function as standardized consumption systems that favor ultra-processed foods (UPF), undermining SDG 11 and creating an “unsafe urban diet” that weakens public health, resilience, and long-term sustainability. Retail design plays a central role. Supermarkets place UPF products in high-visibility end-of-aisle displays, where nearly 70% of impulsive purchases occur, while neighborhood stores dominate street corners with chocolates, snacks, and sugar-sweetened beverages classified as NOVA-4 products, often containing emulsifiers and high-fructose syrups that are designed to stimulate compulsive consumption. Digital platforms have intensified this pattern. Food delivery apps have enabled thousands of “ghost kitchens,” now linked to roughly 26.4% of household caloric intake. Between 2022 and 2024, ready-to-consume food availability increased by 49%, largely optimized for ultra-processed products.

This infrastructure carries environmental and health care costs for governments and people in general. Also, each delivery firm multiplies single-use plastics and CO₂ emissions, directly undermining SDG 11 targets to reduce cities’ environmental footprint. In vulnerable neighborhoods lacking access to fresh markets, the system reinforces the “double burden of malnutrition”: obesity and malnutrition simultaneously. Besides, the current advertising campaigns are not helping people's health. In 2024, Coca-Cola, PepsiCo, and Mondelez invested €11.3 billion in marketing—four times the World Health Organization’s nutrition budget—turning streets, schools, parks, and digital platforms into advertising ecosystems where 60% of food ads promote unhealthy products (full of sugar), often targeting children. As a result, 85.9% of obesity interventions fail because they focus on individual behavior instead of the urban food environment. Cities designed to promote disease can be redesigned to promote health, and companies such as Nestlé can help lead that transition with a new portfolio of sustainable, safe, and profitable products for fast living systems.