

COMMUNIQUE ISSUED AT THE END OF REGIONAL STAKEHOLDERS FORUM ON SUGAR-SWEETENED BEVERAGES TAX, KADUNA, KADUNA STATE

Preamble:

On Thursday 27 July 2023 the Corporate Accountability and Public Participation Africa (CAPPA) and the National Sugar Sweetened Beverages (SSB) Tax Coalition with support from the Global Health Advocacy Incubator (GHA) convened a one-day Regional Stakeholders Forum on SSB Tax in Kaduna, the Kaduna State capital.

The forum held at the Kuciano Hotel in Barnawa, Kaduna State and had 40 participants in attendance. Representatives of the Ministries of Health and Environment from Kaduna, Kano, Kebbi, Sokoto, and Zamfara States, were in attendance as well as health experts, civil society organisations and the media.

The Forum targeted deepening conversations around how to improve public health through reduction in the consumption of SSBs and the need for a more sustainable tax regime on SSBs in Nigeria.

In his welcome words, CAPPA Executive Director, Akinbode Oluwafemi said that the forum is the third in the series, as similar convergences have held in Lagos representing the Southwest and Bayelsa in the South South region of Nigeria where CAPPA equally met with commissioners of health and other critical stakeholders to discussing SSB tax today. He disclosed that after Kaduna there will be another convening in Enugu.

Discussants used the opportunity to explain the rationale behind the N10 Excise Tax on all non-alcoholic, sugar-sweetened carbonated beverages introduced by the Nigerian government through the 2021 Finance Act and correct industry misrepresentation of tax as a tested solution to growing consumption of SSBs. The Bola Ahmed Tinubu administration was equally commended for retaining the N10 per litre of SSB tax in the Finance Act 2023 and urged to increase the tax to a minimum of 20% of the final retail price which is the global standard.

At the end of the very engaging discussions, participants noted the following:

1. Nigeria is the largest consumer of SSBs in Africa and this development has increased the risk of overweight and obesity in children, adolescents, and adults, Type 2 diabetes mellitus (T2DM), cardiovascular disease, cancer, and other health conditions among its citizens.

2. The decision of the Nigerian government to impose a N10 per litre Excise Tax on SSBs is commendable but still falls short of the at least 20% of the final retail price of SSB products as recommended by the WHO and global health experts.
3. There is dearth of funding to address the health impacts of illnesses associated with SSB consumption and other unhealthy lifestyles associated with what Nigerians consume or are exposed to.
4. The aversion of consumers to the SSB Tax regime in Nigeria is largely driven by the misinformation and misrepresentation of SSB Taxes orchestrated by the soft drinks and beverages industry. False marketing and advertising campaigns of the SSB industry reinforce this misinformation.
5. Increasing consumption of SSBs in Nigeria is primarily due to the availability and affordability of SSBs, lacking affordable healthy alternatives, cultural and social norms that encourage and reinforce the consumption of carbonated drinks.
6. SSBs offer no nutritional value to consumers but rather constitute a huge public health and economic burden for the country.
7. State level engagements are largely missing in the discourse on SSB Tax and SSBs in general.
8. The required labelling needed to help Nigerians make informed choices on what they consume is still largely missing.
9. There is still a yawning gap in the level of behavioral change education required by Nigerians to wean themselves off SSBs issue than presently obtains.
10. The media is yet to adequately spotlight the challenges of SSB consumption in news reports. Reporters and media owners may also be under subtle pressure from the soft drinks industry to look away from the health burdens of SSB consumption.

Recommendations

1. Adequate and sustained collaboration by government at state and federal levels spearheaded by the Ministry of Health to engender public awareness on the health risks associated with SSB consumption and the benefits of the SSBs tax policy.

2. Relevant stakeholders, including traditional institution including the Emirate Council, educational institutions, civil society organizations, the media, and healthcare professionals should be actively engaged and recruited in addressing the SSB menace. They should also be at the fore of correcting industry driven misinformation on SSB tax. Local communities must not be left out.
3. The Federal government should work in collaboration with the state governments to expand the coverage of taxes to include other sugar-sweetened beverages that are currently not taxed as precursor to earmarking such taxes to support and strengthen public health systems in Nigeria.
4. SSB Tax should be key on the agenda of the National Council on Health
5. Government should increase taxation on SSBs towards achieving a 20% increase in the final retail price of targeted sugary drinks as recommended by WHO.
6. Need for establishment of a monitoring and evaluation and accountability framework to track the implementation and impact of the current SSB tax policy. This must be reviewed periodically.
7. Need for complementary regulatory instruments like Front-of-Pack Labelling, restricting availability and marketing of SSBs in school environments among others.
8. Need for government to ensure healthier alternatives to SSBs are affordable and readily available.
9. There is a need for national legislation that advocates for the imposition of a pro-health tax.
10. The Federal Government and regulatory authorities must design and enforce penalties for companies that default on SSB tax obligations.
11. Government should ensure periodic review of the SSB tax which is indexed on inflation.
12. Stakeholders should conduct further research and studies on the impact of SSBs consumption and taxation in Nigeria to inform evidence-based policymaking and intervention strategies.
13. Encourage the Ministry of Agriculture to put in place policies and interventions that support farmers and fresh fruits industry to grow more fruits and produce healthy drinks from the fruits as a replacement for unhealthy drinks.

14. Encourage parents to prioritize what their wards consume and particularly groom the benefits of consuming products that do not contain SSBs.
15. Need for behavioral change education to complement the SSB Tax policy. In doing this, local demographics must be taken into cognizance.
16. More exposure of the media to verifiable sources of information on SSB, SSB taxes and industry activities aimed at thwarting the regulation of their products.

Signatories:

1. Corporate Accountability and Public Participation Africa (CAPPA)
2. National SSB Tax coalition
3. Women and Peace Development Initiative
4. Asattahir International Foundation
5. Breakthrough Action Nigeria
6. Equal Access International
7. Tubali Youth Development Initiative
8. Active Support for Rural People Initiative
9. Gender Awareness Trust
10. Environment Action Group
11. Yabanya Development Action
12. Centre for Information Tech. Development
13. FIWON