

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

Preamble:

On 15 June 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 Yenagoa, the Bayelsa State capital.

The forum held at the Chief Harold Dappa Diriye Conference Centre, Golden Tulip Apartment, Yenagoa, Bayelsa and had the Bayelsa State Deputy Governor, Senator Lawrence Ewruhjakpo in attendance. Representatives of the Ministries of Health and Environment from Bayelsa, Edo, Rivers, Delta, Akwa Ibom, and Cross River 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.

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.

Information from Statista indicates that Nigeria is the largest consumer of SSBs in Africa. SSBs are associated with high risk of overweight and obesity in children, adolescents, and adults, Type 2 diabetes mellitus (T2DM), cardiovascular disease, cancer, and other health conditions.

At the end of the very robust engagement, Participants observed the following:

1. The explosion in consumption of SSBs in Nigeria is a public health concern that is connected to the rise in NCDs such as weight gain, obesity, type 2 diabetes, heart and kidney diseases, and cancer, among others.
2. The decision of the Nigerian government to impose a N10 per litre Excise Tax on SSBs is laudable 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. The aversion of consumers to the SSB Tax regime in Nigeria is largely due to misinformation and misrepresentation of SSB Taxes by the soft drinks and beverages industry. False marketing and advertising campaigns of the SSB industry reinforce this misinformation.
4. Nigeria is ranked the fourth largest global consumer of SSBs portends dangerous consequences for public health.
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.

Recommendations

1. Need for adequate and sustained collaboration by government at state and federal levels 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, 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.
3. SSB Tax should be on the agenda of the National Council on Health

4. Government should increase taxation on SSBs towards achieving a 20% increase in the final retail price of targeted sugary drinks as recommended by WHO.
5. Need for establishment of a monitoring and evaluation and accountability framework to track the implementation and impact of the current SSB tax policy.
6. Need for complementary regulatory instruments like Front-of-Pack Labelling, restricting availability and marketing of SSBs in school environments among others.
7. Need for government to ensure healthier alternatives to SSBs are affordable and readily available.
8. There is a need for national legislation that advocates for the imposition of a pro-health tax.
9. The Federal Government and regulatory authorities must design and enforce penalties for companies that default on SSB tax obligations.
10. Government should earmark revenue generated from the SSBs tax to support and strengthen public health systems in Nigeria.
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 parents to prioritize what their wards consume and particularly groom the benefits of consuming products that do not contain SSBs.
14. Need for behavioral change education to complement the SSB Tax policy.

Signatories:

Corporate Accountability and Public Participation Africa (CAPPA)

National SSB Tax coalition

Environmental Rights Action/Friends of the Earth Nigeria (ERA/FoEN)

Rainbow Watch and Development Centre

Oilwatch Nigeria

Community Development Advocacy Foundation (CODAF)

Green Earth for Great Minds Initiative

Zibekien Owen Ogon Development Initiative