

COMMUNIQUE ISSUED AT THE END OF A REGIONAL STAKEHOLDERS FORUM FOR SOUTHWEST ZONE HELD IN LAGOS STATE ON SUGAR-SWEETENED BEVERAGES (SSBs) TAX

Preamble:

The excessive consumption of Sugar Sweetened Beverages (SSBs) is associated with high risk of overweight and obesity in children, adolescents, and adults. There is also evidence indicating correlation between SSBs intake and the prevalence of Type 2 diabetes mellitus (T2DM), cardiovascular disease, cancer, and other health conditions.

As the largest consumer of SSBs in Africa according to Statista, Nigeria faces significant public health challenges. To reduce SSBs consumption and promote healthy lifestyles among citizens, the Nigerian government introduced a N10 Excise Tax on all non-alcoholic, sugar-sweetened carbonated beverages through the 2021 Finance Act.

To strengthen policy efforts and advocacy on SSB tax, Corporate Accountability and Public Participation Africa (CAPPA) and the National SSB Tax Coalition with support from the Global Health Advocacy Incubator (GHAi) convened a one-day Regional Stakeholders Forum on SSB Tax in Lagos State on March 29, 2023. The meeting was to deepen conversations around how to improve public health through reduction in the consumption of SSBs and advocate for a more sustainable tax regime in Nigeria on SSBs.

The stakeholders meeting attracted prominent individuals and organizations including the **Nigeria Customs Service, National Agency for Food and Drug Administration Control (NAFDAC), media representatives, nutrition-focused and public health Civil Society Organizations, the Nigerian Medical Association (NMA)** as well as state agencies such as the **Lagos State Internal Revenue Service, Ministry of Health, Oyo State, Ministry of Health, Osun State, and the Osun State Health Insurance Agency.**

Observations:

The participants observed that:

1. The over consumption of SSBs in Nigeria is a public health concern linked to the rise in non-communicable diseases such as weight gain, obesity, type 2 diabetes, heart and kidney diseases, and cancer.
2. That Nigeria's ranking as the fourth largest global consumer of SSBs portends grave implications for public health.

3. Increasing consumption of SSBs in Nigeria is primarily due to the availability and affordability of SSBs, lack of affordable healthy alternatives, cultural and social norms that encourage the consumption of carbonated drinks, lack of public education on the dangers of SSBs, and the false marketing and advertising campaigns of the SSB industry.
4. The consumption of SSBs offers no nutritional value but rather constitutes a huge public health and economic burden for the country.
5. The decision of the Nigerian government to impose a N10 per litre Excise Tax on SSBs in the country is a step in the right direction but still short of the 20% of the final retail price of SSB products as recommended by global health experts.
6. An effective tax regime on SSB tax will improve public health, influence positive health-behavioural changes, and generate fiscal revenue for financing health systems in Nigeria.

Recommendations

1. Government and policymakers should engage and collaborate with relevant stakeholders, including civil society organizations, media institutions, and healthcare professionals to create public awareness of the health risks associated with SSB consumption and the benefits of the SSBs tax policy.
2. Government should increase taxation on SSBs towards achieving 20% of retail price as recommended by WHO.
3. Establish a monitoring and evaluation and accountability framework to track the implementation and impact of the current SSB tax policy.
4. Government should implement complementary regulatory instruments like Front-of-Pack Labelling, restricting availability and marketing of SSBs in school environments among others.
5. Government should promote healthier alternatives to SSBs.
6. SSB tax campaigners should target key constituents and allies such as education boards, school owners, religious leaders, Parents Teachers Associations, Standard Organization of Nigeria (SON), Ministry of Education, National Health Insurance Authority, Hoteliers Association, Nigerian Union of Teachers, Federal Inland Revenue Service, Nurses and Midwives Association, supermarket associations, Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agencies of Nigeria amongst others to stimulate increased public awareness.

7. State authorities must work to champion the sustainability of the SSB tax in Nigeria by localizing research on the impact of SSB consumption within their respective states and developing strategies to decrease consumption, thereby reinforcing the campaign for SSB taxation.
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 groom children to appreciate the benefits of non-consumption of SSBs.

Signed:
Akinbode Oluwafemi
Executive Director
CAPPA
National SSB Tax coalition