



A STATEMENT PRESENTED TO THE PARLIAMENT OF GHANA BY ADVOCATING FOR HEALTH (A4H) COALITION. ACCRA, GHANA: 15TH NOVEMBER 2022

ACT NOW TO PROMOTE, PROTECT AND GUARANTEE THE HEALTH OF GHANAISANS, AS HEALTH COSTS AND DEATHS LINKED TO DIET-RELATED NON-COMMUNICABLE DISEASES SOAR.

Background

Sugars, particularly in liquid form, also referred to as **sugar sweetened beverages (SSBs)** such as regular soda or soft drinks, fruit drinks, sports drinks, energy drinks, and sweetened waters are harmful to health. The consumption of these beverages is a risk factor for obesity, diabetes, hypertension, cardiovascular disease and many common cancers[1-4]. Sugary drinks remain a major source of sugar in the diet, and its consumption is increasing in most countries of the world especially amongst children and adolescents. Averagely, a single can of a sugary drink contains about 40 grams of free sugars equivalent to around 10 teaspoons of table sugar[5].

Urgent action is needed to curb the rise of NCDs, and thus reach the global non-communicable diseases (NCDs) targets, that Ghana has endorsed. These targets include *“halting the rise of obesity and diabetes; reducing premature deaths from NCDs by 25% by 2025; and one-third by 2030”* (in line with the Sustainable Development Goals). Health Taxes (particularly food-related health taxes such as SSB taxes) have been recommended by the World Health Organization (WHO) as an effective intervention to reduce sugar consumption and help tackle obesity and NCDs[6]. Currently, over 50 countries have enacted such taxes on certain foods profiled as less healthy. Such foods include SSBs. Usually paid at the time of purchase, these excise taxes generate revenue for governments, and discourage the consumption of unhealthy products[7-11]. At the same time the taxes on SSBs instigate reformulation of products with reduced amounts of sugar.

In Ghana, the widespread availability, accessibility[12-14], and relative affordability, and celebrity-endorsed advertisements of health harming SSB warrant urgent governmental intervention. The government of Ghana has an opportunity and a responsibility to act. It is the responsibility of governments to protect, promote, and assure the health of its citizens as per national legislations, policies, as well as international conventions[15, 16]. Toward this end, the WHO recommends taxation of SSBs as an effective intervention to reduce sugar consumption and help address NCDs[6] and stands ready to support any country desirous of protecting, promoting, and improving the health of their citizens.

The Advocating for Health (A4H) Coalition and its Request

Comprising Academia (led by the School of Public Health, University of Ghana), Civil Society Organizations (led by the Ghana NCD Alliance), Public Health Associations (led by Ghana Public Health Association), and Nutrition/Dietetic Professional Group (Ghana Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics), the A4H Coalition is currently advocating for the creation of a favorable environment and stakeholder buy-in for food-related fiscal policies in Ghana. The Coalition believes that if the Ghanaian government implements comprehensive policy measures that serve to limit availability of less healthy foods (e.g. energy-dense nutrient-poor foods, foods that contain too much salt, sugar, and harmful fats), while making available healthy foods (e.g. unprocessed, minimally processed foods including wholegrains, fruits, and vegetables); food actors (e.g. producers and consumers) will make immediate or strategic decisions to reduce availability, attractiveness and consumption of such less healthy foods, or increase availability, attractiveness, and consumption of healthy ones.

- **Concerned** about the escalating prevalence of overweight/obesity in Ghana particularly among women of childbearing age (this increased from 10% in 1993 to 40% in 2015[17];
- **Troubled** by the fact that dietary risk factors of NCDs, high blood pressure, elevated fasting plasma glucose and high body mass index are among the top 10 risk factors that drive the most death and disability combined;
- **Alarmed** by the increasing health and economic burden of these conditions (NCDs have been estimated as responsible for over one-third of all adult deaths in Ghana. NCDs significantly impact workforce and productivity)
- **Cognizant** of the fact that currently available, albeit with patchy implementation, are several evidence-based interventions to reduce the burden of NCDs among populations.
- **The A4H Coalition calls on** the government of Ghana to implement *evidence-informed interventions such as* reducing sugar consumption through effective taxation on SSB. Informed by global as well as local evidence the Coalition specifically asks the government of Ghana:
 - to enact and implement SSB tax now
 - as per WHO guidance, ensure a tax rate of at least 20% to ensure a pass through rate of 20%
 - implement a specific excise tax (volumetric or nutrient-based). Of note, in jurisdictions such as Ghana with strong tax administration, the WHO recommends specific excise taxes calculated based on nutrient content[18]
 - earmark revenue accruing from the imposition of SSB taxes for health promotion expenditure

We are mindful of the fact that taxation on SSB is just one of a range of effective measures proposed by WHO to curb the threat of NCDs. Other interventions such as nutrition labelling; marketing restrictions of unhealthy foods and beverages to children; fruit and vegetable subsidies; physical activity policies and social child-directed marketing campaigns are currently being pursued by the Ministry of Health. Thus, while SSB taxation is not a magic bullet; a simultaneous implementation of multiple ‘carrot and stick’ policies (preferably double-duty policies –aimed at combating malnutrition in all its forms) will make the most impact.

Presented by: The Advocating for Health (A4H) Coalition:

- School of Public Health, University of Ghana
- Ghana Public Health Association
- Ghana NCD Alliance
- Ghana Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics

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