

## 8.W.L. Poster walk: Obesity, food and nutrition

### A qualitative analysis of the design and implementation of the soda tax in Mexico

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#### Issue

In 2012, civil society organizations (CSO), the Ministry of Health, and food and beverage industry leaders were advocating for a public health policy to help address overweight and obesity in Mexico (71.2% of the population are obese or overweight). This resulted in a regulatory initiative launched in 2013, including a tax on sodas and snacks (10% and 8% respectively). The final policy was implemented in September 2013 despite being criticised by advocacy groups due to its perceived loopholes and accepted by the food industry.

#### Description of the problem

This qualitative research explores two main questions: 1) What are the influences that shaped the design and implementation of the soda tax in Mexico? 2) How might commercial interests have affected policy responses? Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a purposive sample of 30 key informants from government, civil society and industry in Mexico in 2014 following implementation of the soda tax. Qualitative analysis was employed to capture actors' perspectives about the drivers and barriers in the policy process.

#### Results

Preliminary findings suggest that the soda tax in Mexico was shaped by range of factors including: a) the lack of progress in reducing obesity despite previous government initiatives b) evidence of limited success of voluntary or self-regulatory measures, c) government requirements at the time for increasing revenue, and d) Ongoing CSO demands. Despite wide engagement, CSOs report being side-lined during the policy design while industry leaders report satisfaction with their input to the policy design, as their values were aligned with government objectives. Due to negotiations between industry and policy-makers, they were on the whole, perceived as partners despite the clear conflicts of interest.

#### Lessons/Conclusions

Taxing unhealthy beverages is as an important health policy that could help tackle obesity. There is little research to support it. Evaluation research often focuses on health outcomes, such as whether such taxes result in reduced consumption. This research demonstrates that novel research approaches are needed to understand the dynamics between actors during different stages of taxation policies for health. Lessons drawn from this research may have implications for public health governance of other food and beverage taxation policies elsewhere.

#### Key messages

- Understanding of network dynamics on the policy design, will help in understanding main coincidences and divergences from the evidence-base arguments, due to embedded interests
- Since taxing foods and beverages is emerging as a popular health policy, novel research is needed to understand the dynamics between actors during different stages of the policy process