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| Supplementary Table 1  Themes of considerations when discussing proposed actions for prioritized indicators in Singapore | |
| Themes | Quotes |
| Political acceptability | EP6 […] Because some of these things are politically acceptable or unacceptable. I mean additional taxes may be less acceptable than reduction of taxes. And those, right? Reduction of taxes for healthy foods may actually also address sort of issues around inequality and equity and access. […] |
| Opposition from industries | EP8 […] I thought it will be quite nice to learn from the tobacco control kind of story, where the increase of price on tobacco, I know it is different, tobacco and food, and it is politically going to be sensitive, and you have got opposition from food lobby etcetera and there are many other things to sort out. But I thought other countries have looked at that with fat tax, sugar tax, it’s something that we can explore further, if not, implement. |
| Evidence of effectiveness | EP6 So can I just make one more suggestion, I am often a little bit late to this discussion. But I think at some level, this isn’t the right forum to decide if we are going to have different taxes, what kind of categories we should work on…  EPU Yeah, exactly.  EP6 nor specific foods. And I think actually, if we want to have the discussion, we should really be thinking about what kind, at the policy level or framework level, how are we going to address these questions around food composition, labelling, and those kinds of things. You know, assessing health claims, rather than, I don’t think we can today decide whether it will be breakfast cereals or is it going to be brown rice. At some level, somebody is going to sit and look at the evidence. |
| EP14 So, can I just say something? I think this relationship between price and whether people are going to buy something or not, is very complex, right? Because in this case, like suppose we are to think of this scenario where you know, like brown rice is cheaper than white rice, people might draw this conclusion that the white rice is of high quality. So therefore we are charging it higher. So there are all sorts of weird relationships going on. So I think the relationship between price and willingness to buy, we actually have to look at it more broadly, more deeply, sorry. |
| EP8 I think voluntary labelling encourages people who, I mean, restaurants who serve healthier options to advertise their healthier options. And mandatory would force those who have less healthy options to declare that they are less healthy. So I just think if Macdonald’s is forced to put out their calorie content and their sugar content on their posters, then less people will go for their chocolate pie. Or at least make a more informed choice when they choose to consume those things. […]  EP1 But menu declaration of calories, fat, and sodium doesn’t really impact change in consumer behavior. So that has been clearly shown. So Starbucks for example, in America, where New York was getting forced to do this. I mean I wouldn’t eat a 350 calories muffin. But to other people, what’s 350 calories? I mean it doesn’t really, until you know they understand it, one fourth of their daily intake, there is no change in consumer behavior. So just putting calories and all these things, on labelling on the menus, I don’t think it makes big difference. […] The consumer doesn’t care. [*unclear*] I mean, playing devil’s advocate but I think the evidence is not so strong. |
| Operational difficulties | EP2 The logistic thing behind it is that when we actually do food rations for the underprivileged or vulnerable. We don’t give them the canned food, if we give them fresh food, the chances are they may not finish eating it. And if we give them vouchers for fresh food redemption, they may sell the vouchers to someone else. So there is the logistics that we need to look at. That is why a lot of people just get staples that have long shelf life like rice and oil and sugar and instant noodles. So that’s is the logistics behind that. |
| EP7 But I think to be fair to them as well, I spoke to Health Promotion Board and I asked them why it can’t be more holistic. But they said that it might actually confuse the public if there are too many messages at one time, which I agree. I mean if you are going to tell about salt and sugar, and like what do we get. And so I think in reality, unless if we come up with a solution, how do we educate the public in very simplistic way and still have measurable outcomes. So unless we give a solution, I think I don’t blame them for going down to the nutrients, so it’s hard. |
| Complementary or bridging nature of actions | EP7 […] So, for example, I could say that I think this is a good action plan to go on because it complements maybe the second indicator. We think that they should go together and then we justify why. Or in this case, I could also say that this is probably a good next step from the Healthier Ingredient Scheme, where currently they are subsidizing but they can’t do that forever. But what we could do as second step is to after that space out. This is probably another potential step in between, sort of an intermediate step. […] |
| EP3 I think that is certainly interesting. But I was just going to make a point back to the tenet of the policy which currently is voluntary in nature. So I think the HPB has said that about 10 to 15% of the current food stalls are taking part in it. So, I guess my question would be whether we would like to recommend that this be, maybe mandatory for certain types of outlets? Otherwise, if you have only 10 to 15%, and very few stalls have minimum, this is really going to be depending on labels to make their decision. Cause you know, there is no consistency across different outlets, so you can’t compare.  EP6 So I’m wondering whether, I mean this isn’t directly related to the menu labelling, but more in relation to food labelling, and front of pack labelling in general. One of my questions, I can’t remember whether it applies to this one but certainly to healthier choice. There is this idea that the standard of the targets are different for different food categories. And it always troubled me a little bit? Because sometimes what we are trying to do is to get people to choose between food categories. We become very reliant on the model where we encourage people to participate because they get some advantage for their product. Clearly, there is a marketing advantage. And the studies have been done to suggest this, that there is advantage for the product. I think that works great if you are getting people to gradually reformulate. So I am not saying that the scheme doesn’t work or something, I think it is important. But at some level, if you are trying to get people to switch between food groups, then some sort of labelling with a fixed goal or target across categories needs to be there. But the moment you do that, then the opportunities in terms for the vendor become less attractive. And that almost needs to be done through a national or regulatory sort of mechanism rather than through a voluntary mechanism. I think we need both and we seem to be tackling one half of the equation and not the other. |
| EP3 I mean I personally like to see an independent body rather than ASAS, which is really an association of advertising agencies mainly. You know, having an oversight on this particular issue. But this is just my personal opinion, kind of looking the advertising landscape. In the list that was given over here, one of things that wasn’t listed is that advertisers are also present in this ASAS committee. So I am not saying that they would always vote in favor of more laxed standards in advertising. But it is not a truly full oversight of the advertising, but kind of a more collective group. […] Also, it is a voluntary body. So, you know, there is no, I think some kind of random placing would be useful, where samples are taken at different time intervals and so on, and to look at advertisements and what’s happening. But right now, ASAS is only able to respond if there is a complain. And so, they are not able to take proactive steps or initiatives to look at the impact.  F2 So you’re saying that in addition to possible new policies or regulations, the current regulation could be better monitored and checked by an independent body that has the capacity to do it.  EP3 That’s right.  EP6 I think that point needs be taken. It seems to be in 3 or 4 domains, this regulation by complaints or by health claim misrepresentation, which is truth, usually results from a complaint when it is identified. Very often, it is a complaint from a competitor. [*some laughter*] So, some sort of more systematic surveillance would make sense.  EP3 Yeah cause if you look at the advertising landscape for financial products for example, or for professionals like doctors, it is under an independent regulatory regime. But you know, for children’s food products, it is not. |
| EP9 If I might just add, I think the Health Promotion Board, they have the My Healthy Plate sort of system. I think in a way, that does try and take a holistic approach. But maybe it’s something like the My Healthy Plate can be updated. Because graphically it is already showing, ok, what are the food groups we should be having and what proportions. But a lot of the times, if you look at the complete picture, they do sort of talked about having wholegrains and drinking water instead of sugar beverages. So maybe something to the effect of low salt and things like that could be added on to the My Healthy Plate to sort of give a more complete message. And also indirectly speaks to more control portion sizes, and also reminding people what food groups they should be focusing on. So in a way, you are kind of getting a message just looking at the one picture. So something which they have which can be upgraded. |
| Food retail environment in Singapore | EP3 So I am not sure what the solution for this is. But I do know that we’ve just, um, in a [tertiary educational institution] they just renovated one whole canteen area. So what used to be just the generic canteen with your 20 outlets selling different things, it is now split into 2 levels. And the bottom level has all the fast-foods now. So we’ve got Long John Silver’s, MacDonald’s, Subway, you know, etcetera. And then upstairs, it is the canteen. And this is the largest canteen that we’ve got, with all the beautiful, air-conditioned and so on. You know, so as the retail space increases in value, I do see that the demand will come from fast-food outlets to move into our hawker centre areas. And even the new hawker centres, I think there is a new one that just opened in Yishun right, it’s got a mix of fast-food outlets as well as traditional hawker shops as well. I am not too sure if that is a trend across Singapore but that has been my experience here.  EP9 If I may just add, I think in Singapore, it’s a little more complicated. As in, we don’t really have to go to fast-food chains to eat unhealthy foods. So even if we just go to regular hawker centres, there are a lot of food options there that classically fall under the unhealthy category. So I think it is a little more complicated to come up with zoning laws here. Because first of all, it is a very small country, you have food centres everywhere and then food centres do have certain stalls that have fried food which is outright unhealthy food. So I think, I mean, you know, it is not as easy as it seems. Like it’s not just that Macdonald’s is the bad guy. [*background laughter*] You have stalls in hawker centres and all that. |
| EP11 I think perhaps it’s also, I mean this is not more for children but more for tertiary institutions. Discounts, a lot of discounts for the quick service restaurants.  EP4 Yes, a lot of discounts.  EP11 They should remove the discounts so that [*unclear*] [*some murmuring and yeahs in the background*].  EP3 And also free delivery, at night, to their dorms.  EP4 A lot of discounts for us you know [*unclear*]. |
| EP3 In my opinion, the retail climate in Singapore is quite tough. It’s very difficult to get space to sell things basically. Even if you want to get a little cart in the shopping centre for a day, it does cost quite a bit. So I’ve not seen a lot of like ground up activities where you have got people from the growing things and so on coming together to sell things.  […]  F1 So when you say facilities, basically it is to provide some scheme or some methodology where they can get some funding to be able to do this.  EP3 Yeah. Or even if you are going to marketing certain kind of produce, then you could be part of a scheme where you could have a certain space maybe in Orchard Road or something on every Sunday, where people can come together to sell fresh produce. It doesn’t have to be too complicated, too structured. Just providing space and lending some of these farmers and so on. Because we do have a vibrant farming community, at least up in Jurong West, where I am. [*background laughter*]  F2 That’s good to hear that there is active farming community. But as you say, it doesn’t have to be subsidized. If you just allow it free for them to stand there, it may be sufficient.  EP3 That’s right. Instead of charging couple of hundred to rent the space.  F1 So in a way, a rental subsidy.  EP4 Yeah, a rental subsidy for those selling healthier foods. |

EP, expert panel member; EPU, unidentified voice of expert panel member; F, facilitator