



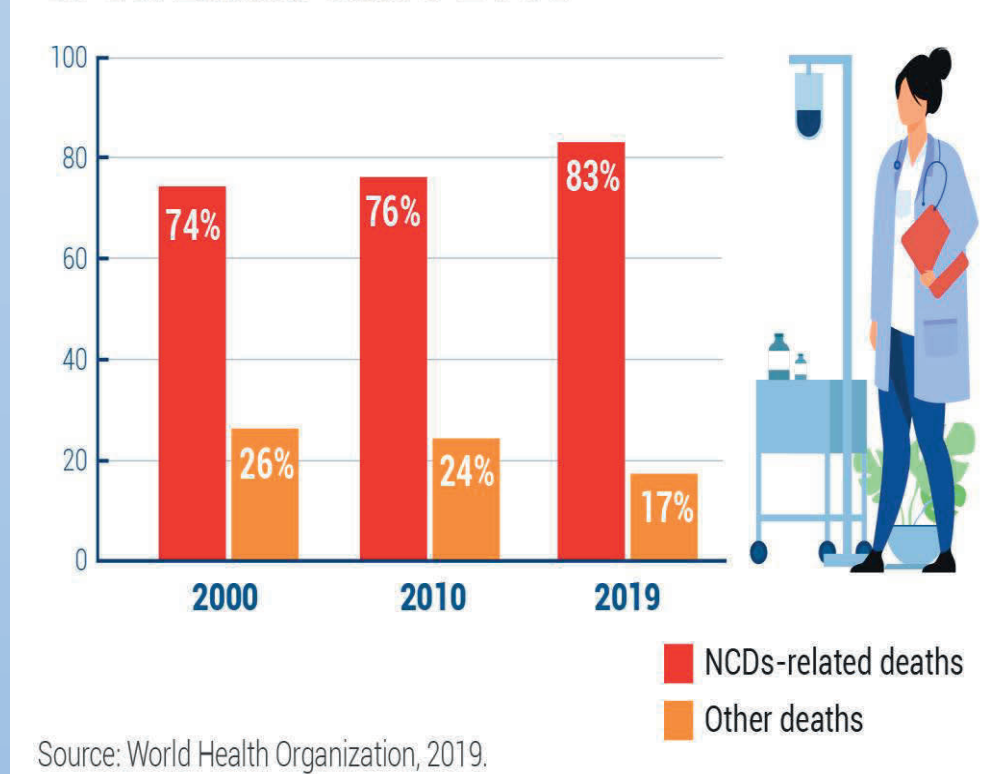
IDEAS, INSTITUTIONS, AND POWER DYNAMICS: THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF FISCAL POLICIES AND REGULATIONS TO PROMOTE HEALTHY DIETS IN SRI LANKA

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BACKGROUND

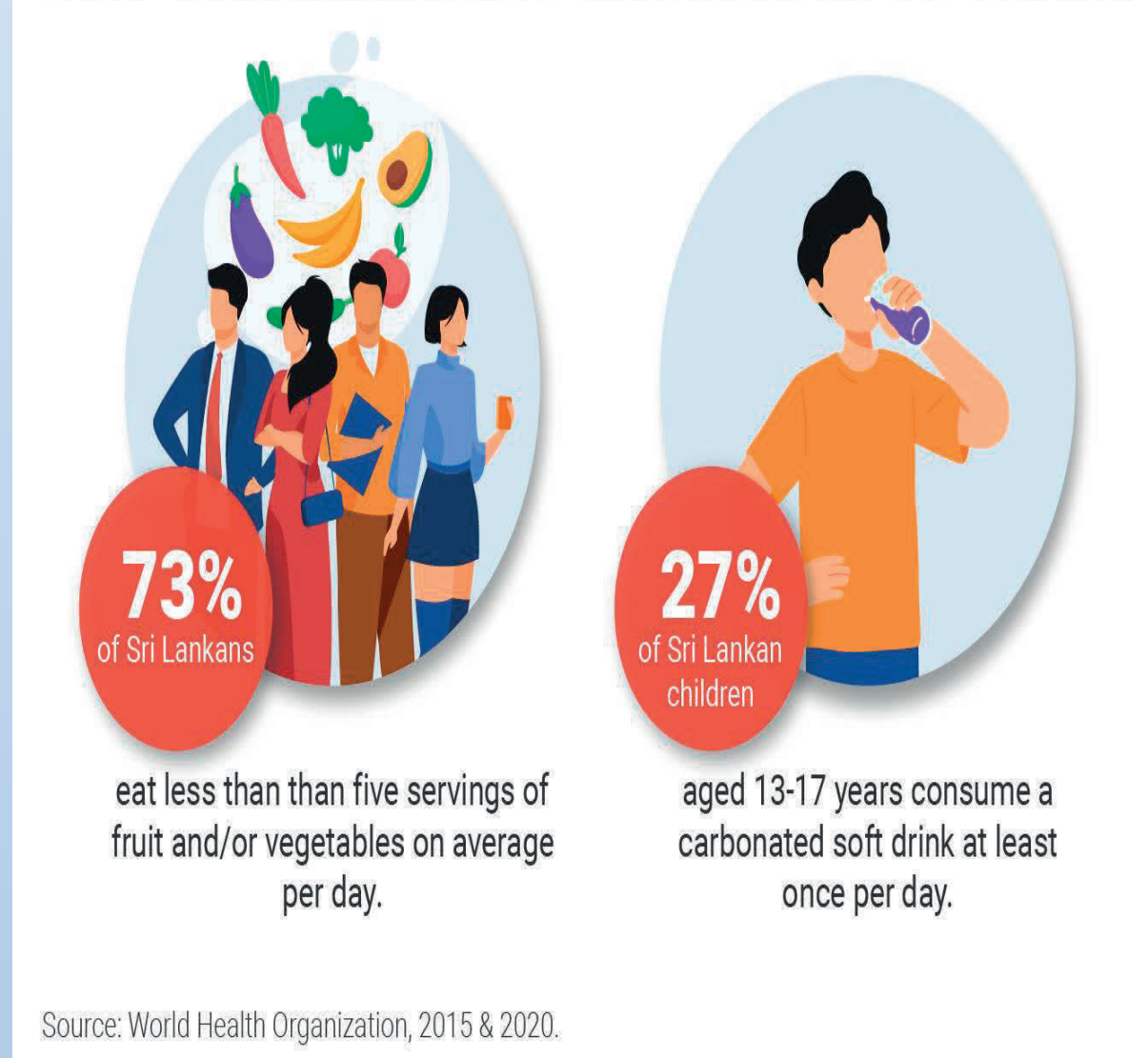
- Non-communicable diseases (NCDs) have posed a critical health challenge for Sri Lanka for several decades.
- Estimated to account for 83 per cent of all deaths in Sri Lanka today, NCDs have serious health and economic consequences for both individuals and the country

Deaths from non-communicable diseases in Sri Lanka since 2000



- Unhealthy dietary patterns are one of the leading contributing factors to escalating non-communicable diseases (NCDs) incidences in Sri Lanka.
- 72.5 per cent of the Sri Lankan population eat less than five servings of fruit and/or vegetables on average per day.
- 26.5 per cent of school children aged 13-17 years reported that they consumed a carbonated soft drink at least once per day.
- Various measures have been taken to promote healthy dietary patterns among Sri Lankans.

Poor diets are a cause of rising non-communicable diseases in Sri Lanka



STUDY OBJECTIVES

- Examine the political economy setting of sugar-sweetened beverages (SSBs) tax (2017), traffic light labelling (TLL) for SSBs (2016) and the country's food environment.
- Identify strategies for public health actors to advocate for more effective policy strategies.

METHODS

- Qualitative study** with a theoretical framework developed based on **Kingdon's theory of agenda-setting** and **Campbell's institutionalist approach**.
- Two forms of data sources: **documentary sources** and **people (key stakeholders)**
- Deductive framework analysis** technique used for both data collection and analysis.

RESULTS

Ideas

Recognition - NCDs, nutrition, and food environment are duly recognized as important policy issues and framed well in health sector policy documents.

Overlooking crucial aspects - Policies have not devoted adequate attention to some crucial aspects like funding sources, commitment to fiscal measures, governance, gender sensitivity, stakeholder identification, and linking NCDs to healthy diets.

Public awareness is insufficient of both SSB tax and TLL system.

Despite fiscal policies to discourage unhealthy consumption, consumers still practice unhealthy dietary patterns.

Institutions

Key institution - The Ministry of Health performs a dominant role in developing policies and regulations to promote healthy diets.

Ministry of Finance, National Planning Department, industry, and development partners (e.g., WHO, WFP, WB) are **important stakeholders**.

Representation and involvement of civil-society members for policy development are **very minimal**.

Power Dynamics

The government exercises power the most yet, **lobbying of the industry** has influenced in formulating policies (e.g., bargaining and influence on SSB tax rate and TLL implementation by powerful corporations).

Food policing is dominated by **medical professionals** whereas nutritionists, agricultural experts possess less voice.

Civil society exercises less influence in policy formulation.

CONCLUSIONS

- The emerging findings emphasize the need of adopting a **more holistic and cohesive approach** in developing policies aiming at promoting healthy dietary patterns in Sri Lanka.
- Ensuring **the involvement of all parties, considering their concerns, establishing mutual trust, and balancing the power dynamics** when developing policies are essential in this regard.
- Coordination for this process should be carried out at the **highest level of the government**.
- Awareness creation** together with rigorous interventions to change food habits, attitudes and cultural norms are needed to reap the maximum benefits of the fiscal policies and regulations to promote healthy diets.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Developing policies to promote healthy diets in Sri Lanka



RELATED WORK

- Policy Insight** based on this study is available on the IPS website <https://www.ips.lk/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/BETTER-POLICIES-FOR-BETTER-DIETS.pdf>

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