Challenges and Pitfalls of Nutrition Labeling Policy in Iran: A Policy Analysis

Authors : Sareh Edalati, Nasrin Omidvar, Arezoo Haghighian Roudsari, Delaram Ghodsi, Azizollaah Zargaran

Abstract : Background and aim: Improving consumer's food choices and providing a healthy food environment by governments is one of the essential approaches to prevent non-communicable diseases and to fulfill the sustainable development goals (SDGs). The present study aimed to provide an analysis of the nutrition labeling policy as one of the main components of the healthy food environment to provide learning lessons for the country and other low and middle-income countries. Methods: Data were collected by reviewing documents and conducting semi-structured interviews with stakeholders. Respondents were selected through purposive and snowball sampling and continued until data saturation. MAXQDA software was used to manage data analysis. A deductive content analysis was used by applying the Kingdon multiple streams and the policy triangulation framework. Results: Iran is the first country in the Middle East and North Africa region, which has implemented nutrition traffic light labeling. The implementation process has gone through two phases: voluntary and mandatory. In the voluntary labeling, volunteer food manufacturers who chose to have the labels would receive an honorary logo and this helped to reduce the food-sector resistance gradually. After this phase, the traffic light labeling became mandatory. Despite these efforts, there has been poor involvement of media for public awareness and sensitization. Also, the inconsistency of nutrition traffic light colors which are based on food standard guidelines, lack of consistency between nutrition traffic light colors, the healthy/unhealthy nature of some food products such as olive oil and diet cola and the absence of a comprehensive evaluation plan were among the pitfalls and policy challenges identified. Conclusions: Strengthening the governance through improving collaboration within health and non-health sectors for implementation, more transparency of truthfulness of nutrition traffic labeling initiating with real ingredients, and applying international and local scientific evidence or any further revision of the program is recommended. Also, developing public awareness campaigns and revising school curriculums to improve students' skills on nutrition label applications should be highly emphasized.

Keywords : nutrition labeling, policy analysis, food environment, Iran