



FACT SHEET



Front-of-Package Food Labeling to Improve Consumer Knowledge on the Healthiness of Packaged Foods in Kenya

Context

This fact sheet presents synthesized information/data on consumers' perceptions and the effectiveness of front-of-package food labels (FoPLs) in identifying unhealthy food products and influencing consumer intentions to purchase these products in Kenya.

What is Front-of-Pack Food Labeling (FoPL)?

Front-of-pack food labeling (FoPLs) are simplified symbols placed on the front of packaged food products to provide consumers with quick and easy-to-understand information about the nutritional content of food products.

Each serving (150g) contains				
Energy 1046kJ 250kcal	Fat 3.0g LOW	Saturates 1.3g LOW	Sugars 34g HIGH	Salt 0.9g MED
13%	4%	7%	38%	15%
of an adult's reference intake				
Typical values (as sold) per 100g: 697kJ/167kcal				

Why is the Front of Pack Food Labeling Important?

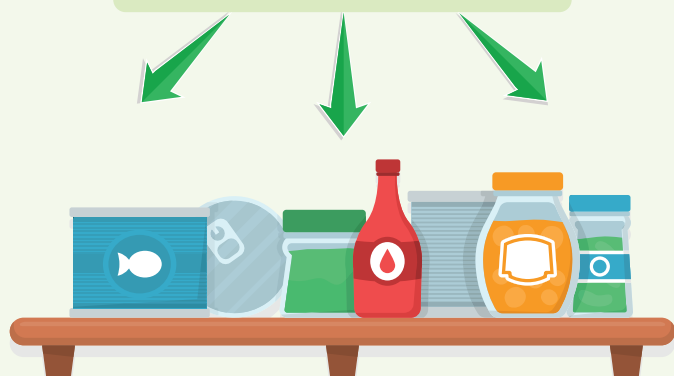
Research shows that FoPLs improve product selection and purchases and improve knowledge and ability to identify healthier food products. FoPLs are proposed to improve consumer understanding to guide their choices.

Why does Kenya Need a Front-of-Pack Food Labeling?

The Kenya Ministry of Health has proposed front-of-pack labels (FoPLs) as a strategy to improve consumers' understanding of healthy foods and guide their choices. When consumers understand the healthiness of foods, they make better choices, hence reducing the risk of chronic diseases such as diabetes, heart diseases, cancers and associated deaths.

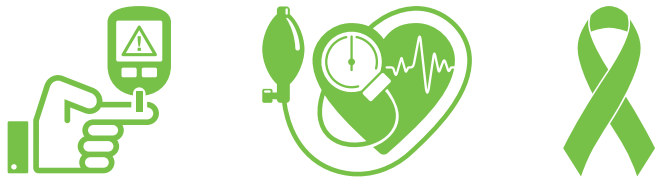
How can the FoPL be Implemented?

The government, through the Ministry of Health, can collaborate with food manufacturers to ensure front-of-pack labeling (FOPL) is clearly displayed on unhealthy packaged foods. In addition, the government could spearhead public education and awareness campaigns along with the civil society organizations to help consumers understand and use the labels when making food choices.



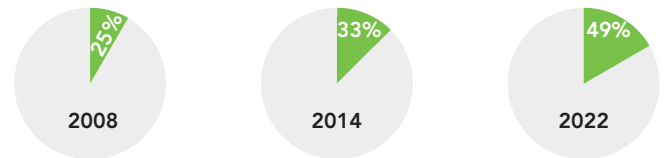
Why is Labeling of Foods Important?

Overconsumption of unhealthy food containing high levels of fat, sugar, and salt is associated with diet-related non-communicable diseases such as diabetes, heart diseases, and cancers.



The latest Kenya Demographic and Health Survey (KDHS) data has shown an upward trend in overweight and obesity prevalence, especially among women,

rising from **25%** in **2008** to **33%** in **2014** and **49%** in **2022**, largely driven by unhealthy food consumption.



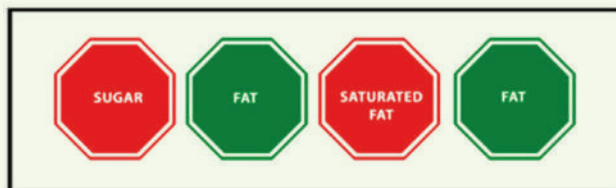
KDHS data of overweight and obesity prevalence in women

In Kenya, NCDs account for **43%** of all deaths and **50%** of hospital admissions. The knowledge of unhealthy foods among the Kenyan population is limited. Increasing consumer knowledge through an easy-to-understand labeling of packaged foods is an essential first step in reducing the consumption of unhealthy foods and prevention of diet-related non-communicable diseases.

Do Consumers in Kenya Understand Food Labeling and FoPL?

Between October and December 2023, APHRC conducted research to test if consumers can use front-of-pack labels to identify the healthiness of food. Three symbols; (Red and Green Octagon (RG), Red and Green with icons Octagons (RGI), and Black Octagon Warning Label (WL) Octagon) were selected for testing. These symbols were proposed by the Kenya Ministry of Health-led technical committee responsible for developing the FoPL standard for Kenya.

The 3 Front-of-Pack Labels Tested in Kenya are Shown Below:



Red and Green (RG)

- Symbols will either be red or green based on compliance
- Red above threshold
- Green within or below threshold



Red and Green with icons (RGI)

- Similar to the 1st FOPL symbol except this version has pictorials or the nutrient of concern is abbreviated



Warning Label (WL)

- Similar to the 1st FOPL symbol, except this version includes additional pictorial elements and abbreviates the nutrients of concern
- Use of color black for the symbol



Findings on How Best Consumers Understand FoPL in Kenya

The study employed both qualitative and quantitative methods, including Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and a Randomized Controlled Trial (RCT).

Qualitative Findings

A total of **137** participants participated in the Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) conducted across four counties; **Garissa, Kisumu, Mombasa** and **Nairobi**.

The majority (**51.8%**) of the participants were male, aged 18–29 (**54%**), and **43.8%** had post-secondary education. The majority (**58.4%**) of the participants were parents of children aged below 18, and they were the main decision-makers (**68.6%**) in the home.

With regards to the purchase of packaged food products, the majority (**38%**) purchased packaged foods a few times a week. Close to half (**47.4%**) bought their food items from shops and kiosks, while **29.9%** got them from supermarkets.

For the qualitative component, which was conducted to explore their understanding and interpretation of labels, five themes describing participants' perspectives on front-of-pack labels were deductively developed:

1. Visibility and Memorability

The Black Octagon Warning Label symbol, with its black and white colors and informative text, emerged as the most consistently remembered label by the consumers.

2. Comprehensibility

The Black Octagon Warning Label symbol was frequently mentioned as the most understood, as it provided additional informative text.

3. Potential Effectiveness

The majority of participants identified the Black Octagon Warning Label symbol as the most effective, citing its impact on their decision-making process.

4. Comparative Rating

While some participants rated the Red and Green (RG) and Red and Green with icons (RGI) symbols better than the Black Octagon Warning Label symbol, it was notable that their understanding of the nutritional information/ healthiness represented by the green and red colors on the label was lacking. Those who rated the Black Octagon Warning Label symbol higher than the Red and Green (RG) and Red and Green with Icons (RGI) symbols appeared to have a better understanding of the nutritional content of the food products.

5. Cultural Appropriateness

Most participants found nothing culturally inappropriate in the FoPL symbols.

Each theme provided valuable insights into participants' perceptions of the labeling strategies, contributing to a comprehensive understanding of their impact and effectiveness.



Quantitative Findings

2198 consumers identified from supermarkets/minimarts in Garissa, Kisumu, Mombasa and Nairobi were shown the symbols placed on packaged foods and interviewed.

- Approximately two-thirds (**64.3%**) of the study participants reported being aware of only the back-of-pack food labels (not front-of-pack labels) that are currently being used on packaged foods, and **55.0%** reported reading nutrition information before purchasing products.
- Those who did not read nutritional information cited the following reasons: lack of time (**24.0%**), not understanding the information on labels (**8.4%**), and ignorance (**52.0%**).
- Their primary source of information about nutrition facts was reading food labels (**42.1%**), followed by the media (**19.1%**) and family members and friends (**17.8%**).

Quantitative analysis showed the Black Octagon Warning Label symbol (WL) to be more effective in the identification of nutrients of concern in all tested food products except for bread. The WL also discouraged the purchase of unhealthy items more than all other FOPLs.



Black Octagon Warning Label symbol (WL)



Correct identification of nutrients of concern and unhealthiness perception of the products

The Bar Graphs Show the Proportion of Participants Correctly Identifying Nutrients of Concern in Food Products Before and After FOPL Exposure

Product A: Potato Crisps

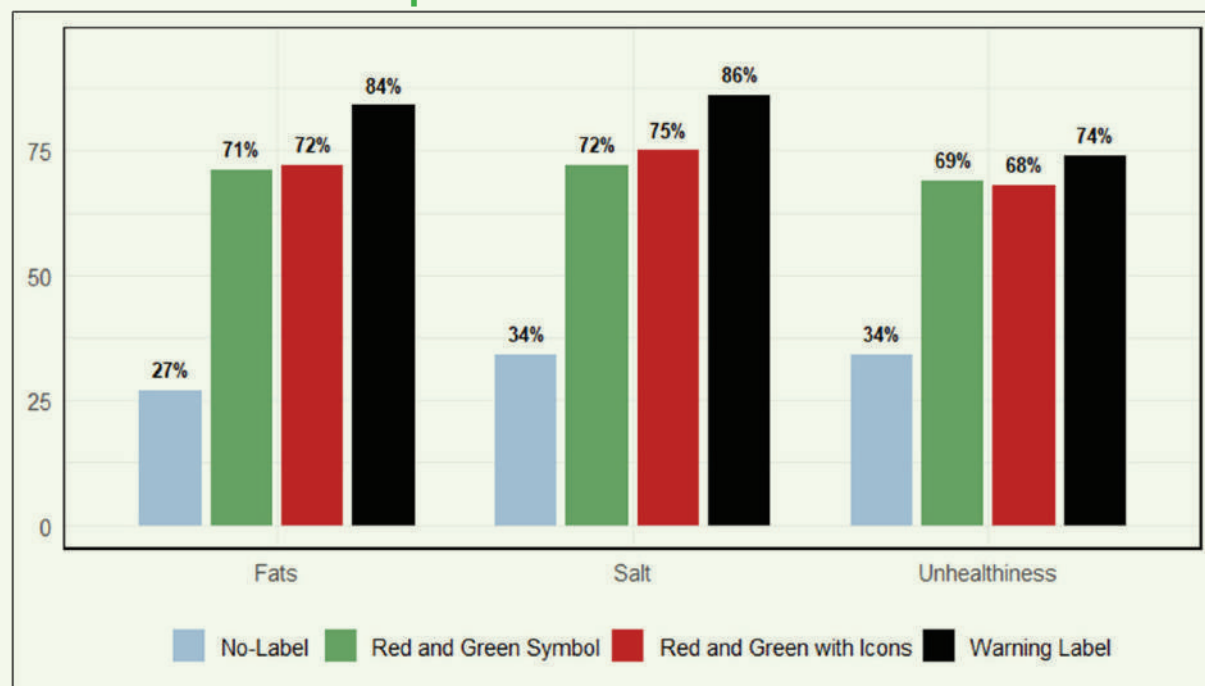


Figure 1: Overall identification of nutrient of concern in Potato crisps

Key Messages

- Exposure to FOPL enabled participants to correctly identify nutrients of concern.
- Participants in the Black Octagon Warning Label symbol were better at correctly identifying nutrients of concern and overall product unhealthiness.

Product B: Packaged Juice

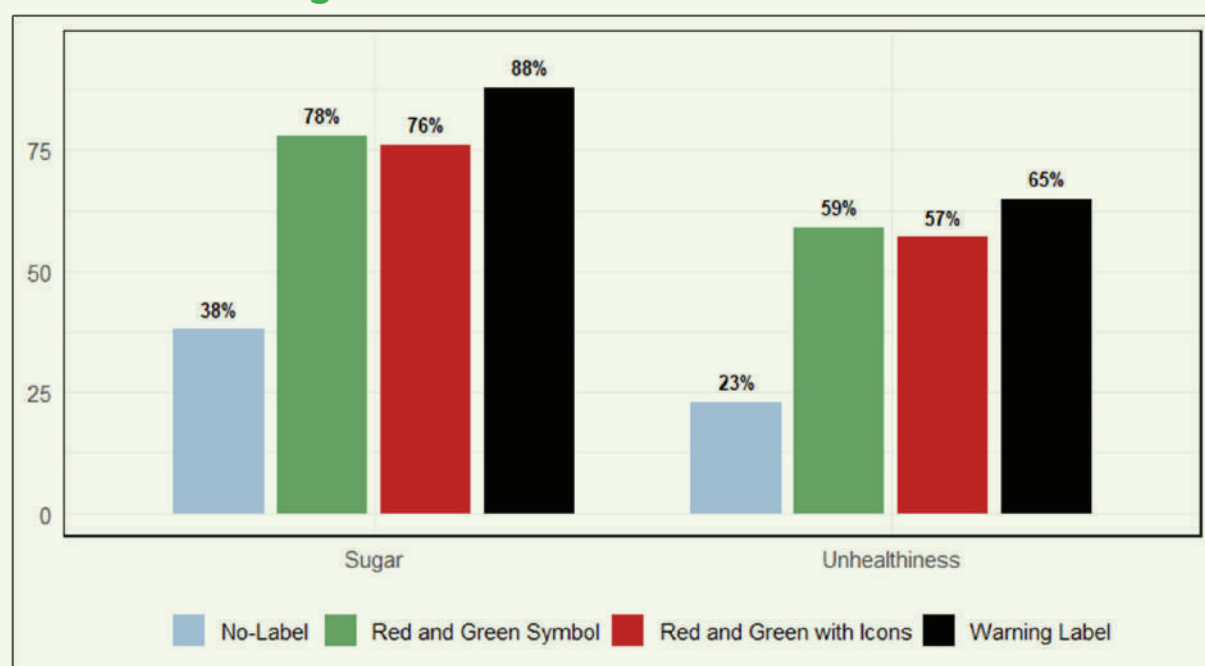


Figure 2: Overall Identification of nutrients of concern in packaged juice

Key Messages

- Presence of labels led to better identification of sugar as a nutrient of concern.
- Black Octagon Warning Label symbol was better at identification of sugar as a nutrient of concern and overall product unhealthiness among the participants.

Product C: Paired Yoghurt Products with Different Nutritional Content

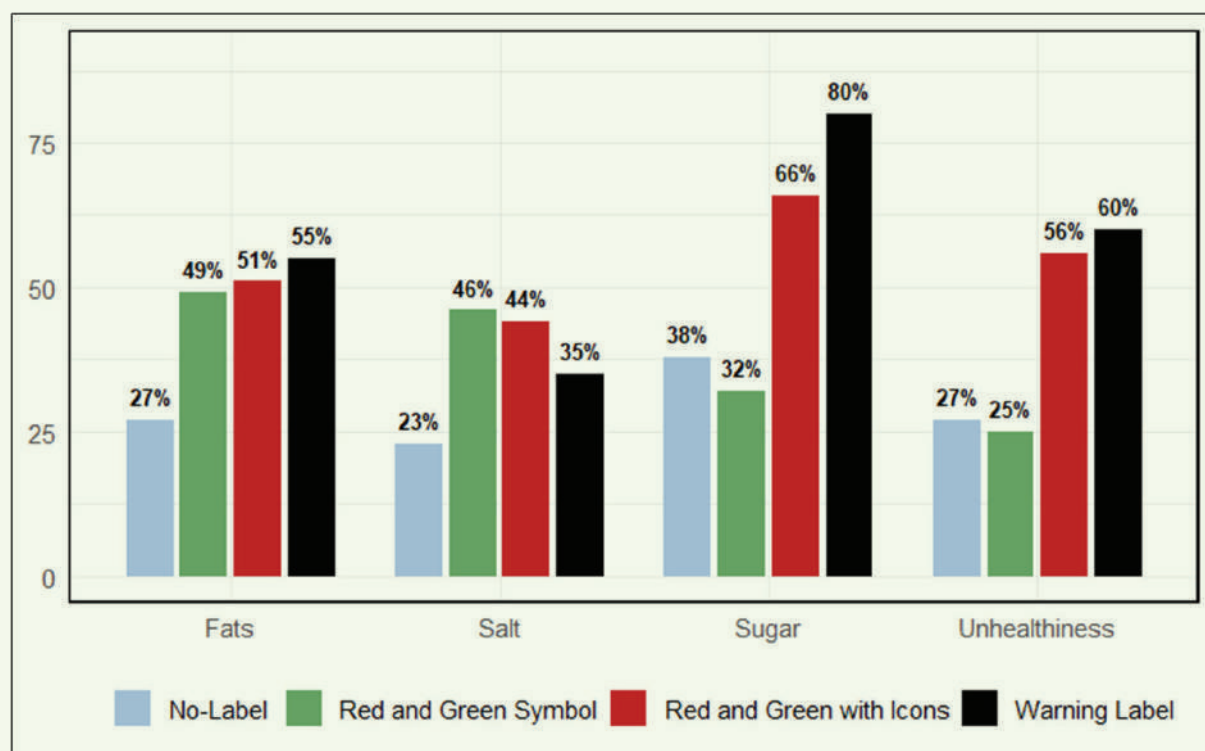


Figure 3: Overall Identification of nutrients of concern between two bread products with different nutritional contents

Key Message

- The Black Octagon Warning Label symbol was best at identifying sugar and fat as nutrients of concern and overall product unhealthiness, while RG was best at identifying salt as a nutrient of concern.

Overall, the findings suggest that the Black Octagon Warning Label symbol is the best FoPL for enabling consumers in Kenya to easily identify high levels of salt, sugar, and fat in packaged foods.

Call to Action

Based on this evidence, the Black Octagon Warning Label is the most effective front-of-package labeling system for Kenyan consumers to quickly identify products high in nutrients of concern (e.g., sugar, sodium, or saturated fat), supporting informed choices between healthier and less healthy options.

The researchers strongly recommend the Government of Kenya develop and implement a front of pack labeling regulation or standard on the labels to guide consumers on their purchases.

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