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BASIC PROJECT INFORMATION

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Understanding and Addressing Barriers in the Implementation of Mexico's School Food Regulation

FINAL TECHNICAL REPORT

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Abstract

Mexico has one of the highest rates of overweight and obesity in the world. One in three children in the country are overweight and/or obese and one in three children born after 2010 are expected to suffer from diabetes over their lifetime. To help redress this public health crisis, the national government introduced its first school food policy intervention in 2010 which established the “Guidelines for the sale and distribution of processed and prepared foods and beverages in the national education system in Mexico,” applicable to all public and private schools. The gradual introduction of these guidelines, from voluntary to obligatory status by 2015, sought to facilitate adoption by allowing time needed to build capacity and put systems in place in schools and regulatory agencies.

Progress to date has been inadequate and disappointing, marked by little awareness of the guidelines among a large sector of school actors, a shortage of adequate education efforts and materials to inform the school community, ineffective penalty mechanisms, and lack of incentives for compliance, among other factors. As a result, energy-dense foods and sugar-sweetened beverages continue to be sold in the majority of schools, in contrast with the poor availability of fresh fruits and vegetables. There is a lack of information and qualitative research on why schools are failing to adhere to regulations, and on how some schools have achieved compliance.

This study will produce a better understanding of opportunities and challenges for improving implementation of the Mexican healthy school food regulation. It focuses on urban primary public schools in Central Mexico. It will carry out exploratory qualitative research with federal and state educational authorities, school administrators, food vendors, teachers, parents, and children, among others, to identify and describe factors that facilitate and constrain the application of the federal regulation. The project will also create and test a communications plan to enhance implementation of the guidelines. Finally, El Poder del Consumidor, a Mexican non-governmental organization, will work to strengthen strategic planning for evidence-based advocacy in the field of obesity and non-communicable disease prevention with a specific focus on healthy school food environments.

Keywords:

School food policy
School food environment
Food environment
Ultraprocessed food

Obesity
Childhood obesity
Non-communicable diseases
Mexico
Latin America



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II. RESEARCH PROBLEM

This project aims to identify why the school food regulation in Mexico has not been fully implemented. It is to explore why unhealthy (banned) foods and beverages continue to be sold in schools and to better understand the complexity of the school food environment and identify the role played by different actors and agencies in promoting implementation or creating barriers to regulation compliance.

As we highlighted in our previous interim reports, the data collected during fieldwork demonstrated the complexity of these barriers and the centrality of barriers and obstacles impeding implementation, whereas very few narratives highlighted facilitators and few schools were fully implementing the regulation. Thus, we have recognized that our main contribution to the academic literature and policy advocacy efforts is in describing these barriers and recommendations to overcome them, rather than focusing on isolated facilitators that were less prominent in the research data. Secondly, our research problem expanded slightly after fieldwork because it became clear that not only did we need to reveal the barriers impeding regulation but also identify the limitations/weaknesses of the design of the existing school food regulation.

III. OBJECTIVES

This project set out one general objective with three specific objectives (see Table 1). Greatest focus was placed on the first and second specific objectives and we will describe here the extent to which our three specific objectives evolved slightly over the course of the project to address the reality on the ground at the time of project implementation.

TABLE 1: Original Objectives, as stated in the MGC

General Objective: To contribute to understanding of barriers and facilitators for the implementation of the national healthy school food regulation in Mexico and explore the effectiveness of targeted communications to foster implementation, through exploratory research in primary urban public schools in central Mexico.

The **specific objectives** of this project are to:

1. **Identify barriers and facilitators** at individual, interpersonal, organizational and policy levels that enable and constrain the implementation of the Mexican federal school food regulation in primary urban public schools.
2. **Develop a communication plan** informed by exploratory research to inform and/or engage a primary and secondary target audience in the school community to foster policy implementation in primary urban public schools.
3. **Strengthen strategic planning** for *El Poder del Consumidor* to identify how to most effectively contribute and advocate through evidence-based action and alliance-building in the field of obesity prevention with a specific focus on healthy school food environments.

With regard to Objective 1, it is important to note that while our investigation not only identified barriers and facilitators to implementation, it also described the school food environment more generally to paint a picture of the school context for policy-makers, researchers and the general public. In the course of fieldwork and analysis we realized that dedicating time and attention to describing this reality would strengthen general understanding and help to heighten the urgency of implementing the school food regulation. Also, as mentioned in the previous section, as our fieldwork revealed extensive and numerous barriers but few facilitators in the school setting, our final analysis focused more on the barriers to implementation. To complement this focus, we ensured that our policy recommendations were comprehensive in nature and through complementary funds, after the completion of the project, we are now in the process of identifying schools that have healthy school food offer to develop short videos to showcase these experiences. This will serve as a complement to the IDRC funded work.

With regard to Objective 2, although the implementation period was greater than originally envisioned, our initial focus did not change over the course of the project. We recognized that to achieve the general project objective, project resources should mainly be focused on Objectives 1 and 2, and Objective 3 should be addressed subsequently based on their results. Furthermore, because the outputs of the previous objectives expanded as did the scope of Objective 1, they each required more time to carry out effectively. We decided it was important to take the extra time to complete these two objectives and then work on Objective 3.

With regard to Objective 3, it is also important to mention that: a) the activities envisioned for the objective changed substantially, in some ways merging with the dissemination activities carried out in Objective 2 and b) our work on Objective 3 began much later than expected, and will continue throughout 2019. First, it was decided that it was necessary to re-envision this objective substantially to take advantage of the current political context. Originally, Objective 3 was envisioned as an internal exercise to develop a strategic plan for action at the same time at which the stage 2 communications campaign was underway; However, as the project timeline overlapped with a transition period and an incoming federal administration in Mexico, from a new political party, it soon became clear that the most effective use of time was taking advantage of the attention in the media and interest of key stakeholders and decision makers to solidify alliances and increase dissemination of the campaign through stakeholder engagement—thus the objective transformed from an internal planning exercise to one of immediate action, taking advantage of emerging opportunities. It also became clear that some members of local administrations, for example the Secretaries of Health in both Mexico City and San Luis Potosí, were interested in the topic of school food so we took initiative to engage immediately with these actors. We recognize that the opportunity afforded by the new administration in Mexico City is unique and we wanted to act on this opportunity, especially because we are aware that political climates and priorities change quickly and it is key to take advantage of synergies when they present themselves. Thus, the scope of Objective 3 changed slightly from being one of developing a long-term strategic plan outlining what engagement would be necessary as a purely internal exercise, to actually beginning said engagement with key stakeholders. We will continue to work on Objective 3 in the coming months, where we will continue stakeholder engagement, as well as carry out interviews with key actors (academics, civil society members and our expert committee members) to actively create new alliances

and also reflect on what additional contacts or relationships we need to secure for furthered success of the campaign.

Finally, we would like to highlight that while working on Objective 2 and launching the communications plan it became clear that there was great momentum to further our school food project, thus, the institutional decision was made to continue the school food project beyond the IDRC-funded period in order to further disseminate our research and communications materials, expand the reach of our communications plan, and carry out additional work on Objective 3. It is also important to mention that due to currency exchange rate fluctuations over the life of the project, we anticipated an overrun in project costs, thus, we made the decision to allocate our limited funds to develop and design a greater variety of materials for our campaign, carry out a more robust evaluation of the campaign and print more campaign materials so that we could support the use of these materials by Mexico City in an initial pilot intervention stage, rather than pay for a consultant to develop a strategic plan, because we felt this was the most effective use of funds.

IV. METHODOLOGY

With regard to the research methods, our Phase I methods did not change in any substantial manner from what was originally proposed. Phase I comprised of a mixed methods research approach, with emphasis on qualitative methods, in which members of the school community, from authorities to school principals to federal, state and local officials (zone supervisors) participated to better understand the implementation of the school food regulation. The robust use of qualitative methods in this study (18 focus groups) with parents and children and 72 interviews with other members of the school community allowed for a deep analysis of the barriers shaping the lack of implementation, many of which would be difficult to capture through the use of surveys and quantitative measures alone, furthermore the inclusion of participants at all levels of the implementation chain allowed us to understand the barriers faced from the local, micro-environment level to the structural, macro-barriers. Thus, the use of qualitative measures, coupled with our broad range of participants we were able to get a comprehensive understanding of barriers to implementation.

With regard to Phase II methods—the development of our communications plan—it is important to mention that our campaign was based in our Phase I research, as such, it was the first time we developed a campaign rooted primarily in primary research. This was a learning experience for the team, in terms of integrating and distilling learnings from the extensive research project to identify the target audiences and the most important messages to transmit in the campaign. This method allowed us to identify local authorities and school principals as an important target audience to address our campaign, which runs counter to our typical campaign targets which are often parents and decision-makers/high authorities. Thus, this method allowed us to create specificity in the target audience that would not have been possible without the information gleaned from Phase I.

Another important methodological aspect of Phase II was the multiple ways in which we pre-tested the campaign, from carrying out interviews with school principals and zone supervisors, to carrying out focus groups with mothers of primary school students to carrying out expert interviews with academics and government decision-makers. These varied perspectives made the process of analyzing our pre-test and

finalizing our campaign materials more difficult and time consuming but we think that it enabled us to have stronger final documents, overall. In particular, including experts proved to be a useful addition to our Phase II methodology, over the course of the project and after reviewing existing literature on communication campaign development. The consultation with experts was a critical addition because it enabled us to not only capture perspectives from the direct beneficiaries and users of these materials but also to understand the optics of these materials from other important actors. Experts gave us direct feedback on many details that helped to ensure our outputs are consistent with a human rights-based approach, inclusive from a cultural, economic and ethnic point of view, and also consistent with the promotion of environmental sustainability. For example, some experts pointed out the importance of taking out images of strawberries that we had on our banner because these were not affordable to many students; other experts recognized the importance of avoiding text that suggested the use of one-use plastics; others noted the importance of avoiding the use of a school uniform skirt to avoid reflecting gender specific dress codes. Another gave insights with regard to the image of the child chosen for our creative concept to insure it was inclusive of the ethnic diversity in Mexico. Other experts specializing in the shift from natural foods to ultra-processed foods commented on the importance of making the fruits and vegetables more appealing in the banner to reflect the richness of the Mexican traditional diet. These experts also gave insights into the timing and manner of disseminating our materials and the type of tone that they thought would be most appropriate for purposes of advocacy: to heighten the probability of use by federal and state authorities. All of these comments were valuable to this work and to future advocacy efforts.

The final methodological change that is important to mention is that after returning our materials to the school community and engaging with stakeholders in the lead up to the campaign launch we recognized that our materials could have utility in states outside of the range in which it was initially intended. Thus, we decided to develop a more robust (nationally representative) digital campaign to test these materials with educators and parents that are in other states to provide additional evidence of the effectiveness and acceptability of the campaign materials to a larger audience. This will be useful for us as we work to “scale up” the campaign and as we dialogue with federal authorities and authorities in other states to encourage its usage in a greater geographic area.

If any research tools would serve useful to other researchers working in the area, please email the Team Members whose contacts are listed above.

V. PROJECT ACTIVITIES

A list of key activities carried out with available resources is described on the following page (Table 2) along with their timelines. The majority of these activities were proposed in the original grant proposal but a few were added, based on strategic considerations and realities faced on the ground over the life of the project. The key evolution in project activities was due to the realization that we needed to produce a greater variety of documents and materials to more effectively communicate research results to diverse audiences and to strengthen the communications campaign’s potential and impact.

We ended up producing more outputs than anticipated; for example, in addition to the principal executive report from the Phase I research, we developed an informational video, infographics, and a



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short policy brief, along with posters, presentations and an article for academic audiences to ensure that our results could reach a variety of audiences. For Phase II, we ended up developing more outputs from this objective to make our communications plan more effective for the targeted audiences. Thus, although, we had originally planned to produce a video, a flyer and a poster using a single campaign concept, we decided to also produce an informational booklet for school authorities (describing the regulation, their responsibilities and recommendations for action), an additional campaign video, a compilation of resources for consultation by school authorities (compiled on a flash drive) and an online subsite dedicated to the campaign.

TABLE 2: PROJECT ACTIVITIES

YEAR	2017											2018										2019										
MONTH	1 J	2 F	3 M	4 A	5 M	6 J	7 J	8 A	9 S	10 O	11 N	12 D	1 3 J	1 4 F	1 5 M	1 6 A	1 7 M	1 8 J	1 9 J	2 0 A	2 1 S	2 2 O	2 3 N	2 4 D	2 5 J	2 6 F	2 7 M	2 8 A	2 9 M	3 0 J		
PHASE 1																																
1.1 School sampling and entry into schools																																
1.2 Expert Committee Meeting																																
1.3 Development & Testing of Instruments																																
1.4 Ethics Approval																																
1.5 Training of Researchers																																
1.6 Fieldwork & Data Collection																																
1.7 Data Transcription & Analysis																																
1.8 Report Write-up (Graphic Design & Printing)																																
1.9 Development of Complementary Research Outputs (Policy brief, webpage, video)																																
1.10 Press Conference																																
1.11 Dissemination of Materials*																																
1.12 Academic poster and oral presentations																																
1.12 Interactive Platform*																																
1.13 Peer-reviewed articles*																																
PHASE 2																																
2.1 Drafting the Communications Plan																																
2.2 Concept & Creative Design Development																																

VI. PROJECT OUTPUTS

The primary project outputs contributing to document the situation of the school food policy environment and our ensuing policy recommendations include the research report, the school food policy brief, two academic posters and a first academic article highlighting the research findings and recommendations in the UNSCN Nutrition 44, as well as the policy recommendations presented at national and state consultations convened by the new federal administration.

The primary outputs in terms of communications materials include the main campaign ad, two campaign videos, an informational booklet for authorities, a school food policy banner to be hung in schools and a flash drive with resource materials, as well as the press releases and media coverage from the two press conferences conducted during the project. The reach of the digital campaign conducted on paid and organic social media to showcase and promote the communication materials speaks to the effectiveness of the communications campaign.

All project outputs, both finalized and in process, are listed and referenced below.

It is important to mention (as stated in Objectives) that due to the shifting political climate and immediate opportunities for advocacy, we targeted these opportunities rather than developing the originally intended internal strategic planning document. As explained above, we believe that the time and resources were better spent during the project period on producing materials for the public, media and policy-makers and disseminating these materials as part of our on-going engagement. Now that the IDRC-financed project has come to a close we will have time to look inward so that we can better plan our next campaign phase, but nevertheless the foreseen output will not resemble a three-year plan but rather will take the form of a few targeted activities and network building actions that can help us plan for and strengthen dissemination of the campaign and its impact.

1. RESEARCH & POLICY DOCUMENTS/COMMUNICATIONS MATERIALS

- **Research Reports/Policy Briefs**

- Bahena L, Torres F, Calvillo A. (2018) *Resumen Ejecutivo: Explorando el ambiente escolar alimentario: barreras y facilitadores en la implementación de la regulación de la venta de alimentos y bebidas en escuelas primarias del centro de México*. El Poder del Consumidor: Mexico City. Available at: [file:///C:/Users/Usuario1-E%60PC/Downloads/Documento-ResumenEjecutivo-EscuelaSaludablesWEB%20\(15\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/Usuario1-E%60PC/Downloads/Documento-ResumenEjecutivo-EscuelaSaludablesWEB%20(15).pdf) **(Research Report in Spanish; to be available by end 2019 in English)**
- Alianza por la Salud Alimentaria. (2018) *El ambiente escolar obesogénico en México: La necesidad de mejorar la regulación de la venta de alimentos y bebidas en escuelas*. Alianza por la Salud Alimentaria: Mexico City. Available at: [file:///C:/Users/EPC-X260%201/Downloads/PN4VfmyAlt4V_Hoja-informativa-Escuelas_web%20\(7\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/EPC-X260%201/Downloads/PN4VfmyAlt4V_Hoja-informativa-Escuelas_web%20(7).pdf) **(Policy Brief on School Food Regulation in Mexico)**
- Bahena L, Torres F, Calvillo A. (2019, embargoed until publication of academic article) *Explorando el ambiente escolar alimentario: barreras y facilitadores de la implementación de la regulación de la venta de alimentos y bebidas en las escuelas primarias del centro de México*. El Poder del Consumidor: Mexico City. **(Long form research report)**

- **Policy Proposal/Recommendations**

- Bahena L. (November 2018) *Propuesta para una política de alimentación en entornos escolares de El Poder del Consumidor. Foro de Consulta Estatal Participativa en Morelos. Educación para el Bienestar: Acuerdo Nacional sobre la Educación, Morelos, Mexico. (Presentation)*
- El Poder del Consumidor. (2018) *Propuesta para una Política de alimentación en entornos escolares*. Consulta Nacional por un Acuerdo Nacional para una Educación con Equidad y Calidad para el Bienestar de todos los mexicanos. Poder del Consumidor. **(Submission to National Consultation in three Mexican States)**

- **Academic Articles, Posters & Conference Presentations**



- Macari M, Bahena L, Torres F, Berner R, Calvillo A. (2019) *Improving the School Food Environment through Policy: A Case Study of Challenges and Recommendations from Mexico*. UNSCN Nutrition 44 (2019). United Nations Standing Committee on Nutrition: Rome. Available at: <https://www.unscn.org/en/resource-center/Unscn-news?idnews=1976>.
- Bahena L et al. (2019, in process) *Obesogenic school environment in Mexico: barriers to apply regulation of the sale of food and beverages in primary schools (exact title pending)*. **(Pre-submission for academic article)**
- Bahena L, Torres F, Calvillo A. (2019) *El ambiente escolar obesogénico en México: La necesidad de mejorar la regulación de la venta de alimentos y bebidas en escuelas*. Congreso de Investigación en Salud Pública, Morelos, Mexico, 27-29 March. El Poder del Consumidor: Mexico City **(Oral Presentation)**
- Torres F, Bahena L, Calvillo A. (2019) *La regulación de venta de alimentos y bebidas en escuelas primarias de México: factores que obstaculizan la implementación*. Congreso de Investigación en Salud Pública, Morelos, Mexico, 27-29 March. El Poder del Consumidor: Mexico City. **(Oral Presentation)**
- Bahena L, Torres F, Calvillo A. (2018) *Ambiente escolar-alimentario: situación actual de la regulación sobre venta de alimentos-bebidas en escuelas primarias de México*. Congreso de la Sociedad Latinoamericana de Nutrición, Guadalajara, Mexico, 11-15 November. El Poder del Consumidor: Mexico City. **(Poster Presentation)**
- Torres F, Bahena L, Calvillo A. (2018) *Barreras en la implementación de la regulación de venta de alimentos-bebidas en escuelas primarias de México*. Congreso de la Sociedad Latinoamericana de Nutrición, Guadalajara, Mexico, 11-15 November. El Poder del Consumidor: Mexico City. **(Poster Presentation)**
- **Newspaper Op-Ed**
 - Calvillo A. (09 Oct 2018) ¿Moctezuma ignorará como Nuño “La Olla Escolar”? *Sin Embargo*. Available at <https://www.sinembargo.mx/09-10-2018/3481826>.
- **Web content dedicated to the project on the “My Healthy School” website**
 - El Poder del Consumidor y Red por los Derechos de la Infancia en México. (2019) *Explorando el ambiente escolar alimentario: Conoce los resultados de la investigación en Mi Escuela Saludable*. Available at: <https://miescuelasaludable.org/investigacionescuelas/> **(Web content dedicated to Research Results)**
 - El Poder del Consumidor y Red por los Derechos de la Infancia en México. (2019) *Acciones para lograr escuelas 100% libres de comida chatarra en Mi Escuela Saludable*. Available at: <https://miescuelasaludable.org/escuelaslibresdechatarra/> **(Web content dedicated to Communication Campaign)**
- **Communication Campaign Materials**
 - El Poder del Consumidor. (2019) *Escuelas 100% libres de comida chatarra*. El Poder del Consumidor: Mexico City. **(Campaign Advertisement)**
 - **El Poder del Consumidor**. (2019) 100% Junkfood free Schools. El Poder del Consumidor: Mexico City. **(English translation of Campaign Advertisement)**
 - El Poder del Consumidor. (2019) *¿Conoces los alimentos y bebidas permitidos y no permitidos para la venta en las escuelas primarias?* El Poder del Consumidor: Mexico City. Available at: <https://miescuelasaludable.org/materiales-para-padres-de-familia-y-alumnos/> **(School Food Regulation Banner, various sizes to accommodate different uses by the school community)**
 - El Poder del Consumidor. *Do you know which foods and beverages are permitted and prohibited for sale in primary schools?* El Poder del Consumidor: Mexico City. **(English Translation of School Food Regulation Banner)**
 - El Poder del Consumidor. (2019) *¿Cómo lograr una alimentación saludable en las escuelas? Recomendaciones para la aplicación de la regulación de la venta de alimentos y bebidas*. El Poder del Consumidor: Mexico City. Available at: [file:///C:/Users/EPC-X260%201/Downloads/como lograr una alimentacion saludable en las escuelas Versio ndigital.pdf](file:///C:/Users/EPC-X260%201/Downloads/como%20lograr%20una%20alimentacion%20saludable%20en%20las%20escuelas%20Versio%20ndigital.pdf) **(Informational Booklet; also to be available by end 2019 in English)**
 - El Poder del Consumidor. (2019) *Escuelas 100% libres de comida chatarra* Informational Leaflet. El Poder del Consumidor: Mexico City. **(Campaign flyer)**



- El Poder del Consumidor. (2019) Escuelas 100% libres de comida chatarra Campaign and Complementary Materials USB. El Poder del Consumidor: Mexico City. **(Flash drive with resources for consultation)**

- **Infographics**

- El Poder del Consumidor. (2018) *La situación actual: un ambiente escolar no saludable*. El Poder del Consumidor: Mexico City. Available at: https://miescuelasaludable.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/001_MiEscuelaInvestigacion-ThumbnailElmagen-Graficas-02opt.jpg
- El Poder del Consumidor. (2018) *Los factores que influyen en el incumplimiento de la regulación*. El Poder del Consumidor: Mexico City. Available at: https://miescuelasaludable.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/001_MiEscuelaInvestigacion-ThumbnailElmagen-Graficas-02opt.jpg
- El Poder del Consumidor. (2018) *Propuesta para una política de alimentación en entornos escolares*. El Poder del Consumidor: Mexico City. Available at: <https://miescuelasaludable.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/propuestafull2.jpg>
- El Poder del Consumidor. (2018) *Alimentos y bebidas que sí y no pueden venderse en las escuelas*. El Poder del Consumidor: Mexico City.
- El Poder del Consumidor. (2019) *Los siete elementos claves para tener ambientes escolares saludables*. El Poder del Consumidor: Mexico City. Available at: <https://miescuelasaludable.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Graficas-SieteElementos.pdf>
- El Poder del Consumidor. (2019) *La cadena de implementación de la regulación: Instituciones y actores de la comunidad escolar involucrados en su aplicación*. El Poder del Consumidor: Mexico City. Available at: <https://miescuelasaludable.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Graficas-CadenalImplementacion.pdf>
- El Poder del Consumidor. (2019, in process) *Obstáculos y facilitadores que influyen en la aplicación de la regulación sobre la venta de alimentos y bebidas en las escuelas primarias*. El Poder del Consumidor: Mexico City.

- **Videos**

- El Poder del Consumidor. (2018) *¿Por qué nuestras escuelas no son saludables?* El Poder del Consumidor: Mexico City. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VLyippwz-al>
- El Poder del Consumidor. (2019) *¿En la escuela de tus hijos todavía hay comida chatarra?* El Poder del Consumidor: Mexico City. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=4&v=90_VxtFwk7A

- **Interactive Online Platform for Research Results**

- El Poder del Consumidor. (2019, in process) *Plataforma interactiva: Los ambientes escolares alimentarios en México*. El Poder del Consumidor: Mexico City.

- **Press Conferences and Press Releases**

- El Poder del Consumidor. (28 August 2018) Presentación de los resultados de la investigación “Explorando el ambiente escolar alimentario”. Mexico City, Mexico. *51% de alimentos y bebidas que se venden en las escuelas son “chatarra”*. El Poder del Consumidor: Mexico City. Available at: <https://elpoderdelconsumidor.org/2018/08/51-de-alimentos-y-bebidas-que-se-venden-en-las-escuelas-son-chatarra/>
- El Poder del Consumidor. (13 May 2019) Lanzamiento de la campaña “Exijamos escuelas 100% libres de comida chatarra”. Mexico City, Mexico. Ante la falta del cumplimiento de la regulación que prohíbe la venta de comida chatarra en escuelas, lanzamos la campaña: Escuelas 100% libres de comida chatarra. El Poder del Consumidor: Mexico City. Available at: <https://elpoderdelconsumidor.org/2019/05/ante-la-falta-del-cumplimiento-de-la-regulacion-que-prohíbe-la-venta-de-comida-chatarra-en-escuelas-lanzamos-la-campana-escuelas-100-libres-de-comida-chatarra/>

Note: The materials above that are listed “in process” are planned to be completed by the end of 2019. We will also be submitting a pre-submission for an academic journal article in the next month and subsequently a submission of at least one other article.

2. INVOLVEMENT OF RESEARCH USERS OR BENEFICIARIES

- **Fieldwork:** The research report was developed based on a mixed-methods research project carried out in nine schools, in three state capitals (Mexico City; San Luis Potosí, San Luis Potosí; and Cuernavaca, Morelos). 73 interviews were conducted with key members of the school community and authorities, 9 focus groups with children and 9 with school parents (152 focus group participants in total).
- **Communications campaign pre-testing:** For the development of the campaign materials, we conducted pre-testing through focus groups with mothers of primary school students, based in Mexico City (2 focus groups with 9-10 participants each), in addition to individual in-depth interviews with health and educational authorities (n=5), zone supervisors (n=5), school directors (n=5) and experts (health authorities and academics, n=5). The objective of this pre-testing was to validate the campaign creative concept and main orientation and content of the campaign messaging and materials with the target audiences of the communication campaign to incorporate their input into the final designs and dissemination plan.
- **Post-test, Return of Materials to Community:** In addition to testing the materials with beneficiaries before the launch, we carried out a post-test/evaluation of the materials after the launch by returning to the same school directors and zone supervisors in the three states that participated in our study (or their replacements) to carry out a short survey to disseminate the materials and to assess their relevance from their perspective. In total, 14 participants, 8 directors and 6 zone supervisors participated in the survey.
- **Digital Evaluation:** A digital evaluation is proposed in which members of the educational community and parents participate in an online survey to evaluate the campaign and to inform Phase II launch of the materials. This is proposed with 1,000 people (800 parents and 200 teachers and/or educational authorities).

3. CAPACITY-BUILDING OUTPUTS

- **Project Team Development Milestones & Actions:** The IDRC project gave El Poder del Consumidor the opportunity to attract and contract trained researchers and offered us the opportunity to complement their skills with those essential for advocacy. Engagement of the two women hired to lead and implement the project (Coordinator and Researcher), the two women hired as field assistants, and the EPC team with consultants has resulted in a process of capacity-building and training over the life of the project. This involved data collection and data analysis training, as well as training on focus group and interview moderation for the EPC research team and field assistants. In addition, the research team received feedback from our external qualitative research consultant on academic and policy writing processes. Importantly, the research team began with different levels of experience in qualitative research design and implementation, and with little formal experience in communication campaign development and messaging. During the final year of the project, they were centrally involved in the development, testing and evaluation of such a campaign, assisted by expert consultants and guided by other EPC team members. Furthermore, the project team engaged in media training and the Project Coordinator had the opportunity to present at two press conferences and carry out various media interviews. In this way, the project team strengthened their research skills over the course of the project, improving their ability to analyze and present data to a general audience and decision-makers and how to make research findings relevant for policy making. They complemented these research skills with communication and media training and direct engagement for advocacy purposes over the course of this project. This opportunity enabled the team to develop the combined skills essential for evidence-based policy making (research and advocacy/communication).
- **Achievements in Institutional Capacity:** In parallel, the IDRC project provided EPC staff with the opportunity to carry out a long-term, applied research project, which increased our capacities in a variety of ways, from implementing in-depth fieldwork, to successfully completing the ethics approval process to launching a campaign based on original research. This experience greatly increased our institutional awareness and ability to implement these types of research projects and strengthened our ability to design and present original qualitative research so that it has impact and relevance for policy-making. As mentioned in a previous report, we also developed skills in terms of internal monitoring of long-term projects, which has already served us in the

administration of other projects, we have also strengthened our processes/protocol related to document development, for example, with the use of a creative brief to inform all members involved in creative development (researchers, communication team, graphic design, management staff of the intended use, objective of each material).

- **Sustainability of Increased Institutional Capacities:** As a result of the permanent staff having had increased their capacities during this project, it will result in long-term and sustained benefits for the institution. First of all, this project has enabled us to strengthen our school food policy work, allowing us to maintain our relevance and influence in shaping the debate in media and public opinion about school food policy by generating unique and relevant research and communications materials. It has enabled the organization to bolster its reputation among researchers, through presentations and posters at academic conferences and through the contribution that our final report has made to the evidence-base on school food policy implementation; hence, this project has enabled El Poder del Consumidor to be seen as a knowledge-producer. It has also allowed the organization to continue to be seen as a reference point for journalists when discussing school food policy. In this sense, the project has created great momentum that we want to capitalize on, through the expansion of the co-financing from Bloomberg Philanthropies through January 2019, we have hired both the Project Coordinator and the Project Researcher for seven more months so that they can continue advancing the agenda of the school food policy work stream.

It is also important to note that the process of this research project continues to be beneficial to other areas of the organization to strengthen other workstreams. For example, the legal team's work on reporting human rights violations and filing cases about the violation to children's rights continue to be informed and to reference the work of this study; we have reviewed the questions pertaining to school food policy of the annual National Obesity Survey that El Poder del Consumidor carries out in Mexico (with a representative sample) in light of the results of the IDRC project; and our knowledge of how to navigate ethics approval and the process entailed for accessing field/research participants has been built into two subsequent submissions by EPC for other research projects (one on oral health and another on public-private partnerships), and if these proposals are approved, our capacity to conduct them will be highly informed by our experience with IDRC.

Furthermore, our international work with the UN Committee of Food Security, the FAO/WHO ICN2 follow-up process, and the 2030 Agenda is also informed by the results of our project (commentaries, public consultations, etc). In this way, the benefits from this project will continue to be reflected in various other advocacy processes and organizational outputs.

- **Capacity-building of Media/Key Stakeholders:** We held two press events (August 2018 and May 2019) which were attended by media outlets, academics, school and health authorities, UN agencies, civil society organizations and university students, helping to heighten both media understanding of the relevant issues around school food policy, as well as stakeholder engagement.
- **Milestones with Stakeholders:** El Poder del Consumidor received an invitation to take part in a PAHO Mexico workshop to discuss the School Health Survey, a survey carried out by WHO and completed/submitted by many countries to assess school health, alongside Mexico's federal Secretariats of Health and Education. The survey is considered a surveillance mechanism to identify risk and protective factors to school health. This was the first year that Mexico completed the study and our participation enabled aspects of school food policy to be considered in this diagnostic. We anticipate that these links with stakeholders will be maintained in the years to come and that El Poder del Consumidor will continue to be seen as an important actor in the educational health space.

VII. PROJECT OUTCOMES

The principal outcomes of the project include enhanced attention to the school food policy debate, particularly in regards to the structural barriers affecting the implementation of the existing school food regulation, in the media, among inter-governmental organizations, among researchers and among the general public.

However, the most important outcome is the beginnings of a "scaling up" of our communications campaign through alliances with the state authorities (Secretariats of Health) in Mexico City and

potentially also in the state of San Luis Potosí, which will potentially result in the dissemination of the campaign materials to approximately 400 primary schools.

1. Scientific, research, and/or knowledge innovations

- This research added to the knowledge base by complementing existing research (mainly quantitative) to provide a panorama of the school food environment after the school food policy entered into effect, to inform policy-makers and researchers about the obstacles preventing implementation of the regulation and to provide recommendations for a comprehensive policy approach to create a healthy school food environment.
- In addition, the results of the research led to certain knowledge innovations in the sense that knowledge gleaned from the project informed other research processes, including the annual National Obesity Survey, a nationally representative survey on nutritional health and policy knowledge, practices and perceptions carried out by El Poder del Consumidor and Dinamia, and hopefully future research by El Poder del Consumidor in this field and others.

2. Changes in behavior, capacities, actions, or relationships of researchers, networks, or research institutions

- The results of our school food project are helping shape the discourse of researchers, including at the National Institute for Public Health of Mexico. For example, at a presentation of their new book *“La Obesidad en México: Estado de la política pública y recomendaciones para su prevención y control”* in Congress, where Congresspeople, government authorities, academics and civil society members were in attendance to discuss priority policies for obesity prevention in Mexico, childhood nutrition was considered a central pillar for obesity prevention. Among the recommendations for policy improvement was increased financing for schools to ensure that they are not reliant on food sales for their operation; this is a structural barrier that our research revealed and reinforced in the literature.
- In addition, the Expert Committee that we convened for our project, opened communication with national and international experts to not only discuss the details of our research and our communication plan strategy but also helped us gain access to authorities and decision-makers and helped us to strategize politically.
- Furthermore, our project attracted attention from FAO, UNICEF and PAHO in Mexico, and as a result, we have strengthened our institutional relationship with these organizations in our school food work and other workstreams.
- At meetings, including the 2019 SLAN Congress and meeting on healthy school food practices at FAO, the results of our research were highlighted in the presentation of the PAHO Advisor on Chronic Disease.

3. Changes in behavior, capacities, actions, or relationships of research beneficiaries or those affected by the research process or findings

- The evaluation survey carried out with the directors of the participating schools in our study and five of the nine zone supervisors suggests that, in general, the participants felt that the materials were very attractive and innovative and were in agreement that the materials motivated them and increased their intention to support healthy school food. They noted their interest to utilize the materials and to disseminate the informative booklet and banner to the school community.

4. Media influence: The results of our school food project helped garner media attention to the issue of failed implementation of Mexico’s national school food policy. Considering that the policy is nine years old, it has not been a focus of attention in the media but the release of the school food policy research report and subsequently the communication campaign reintroduced the topic to the news. Research results were disseminated at two press conferences, online in social media, as well as at two academic conferences.

- At the August 2018 press conference, the Phase I research results were commented by guest speakers J.Rivera (INSP), M.Malo (PAHO) and J.Martín (REDIM), calling for improved, integral school food policy, and were covered by **33 media outlets** including key national dailies (*Reforma, Milenio, La Prensa, La Jornada, La Crónica, El Sol de México*) and portals (*Reforma.com, La Jornada, Sin Embargo, Mural.com, El Norte.com*).
- At the May 2019 press conference to launch the “Schools 100% Free of Junk Food” campaign, as part of the My Healthy School initiative and with guest panelists from INSP and the Mexican

Children's Rights Network (REDIM) and E.Jacoby, in the face of poorly designed school food regulation and non-compliance, the Phase II communication campaign received coverage from **53 media outlets**, primarily in key portals (*Proceso, MVS Noticias, Publimetro, Jornada.com, 88.9 noticias, Crónica, 24 horas, Antena Noticias*).

- Furthermore, our school food policy work was mentioned more generally at various other times during the year, for example, at the end of the school year, with over 30 news outlets reporting on the lack of implementation of the school food policy, all citing the My Healthy School Platform and the IDRC school food project to demonstrate that schools continue to sell junk food. The IDRC project has helped to ensure that school food policy remains in the news over the past year and it has shaped the discourse on school food policy, highlighting the lack of implementation of the policy.

5. Policy influence (e.g., expanded policy capacities; broadening horizons of policy-makers, affecting policy)

- Over the course of the project, we reinitiated dialogue with officials at the General Directorship of Health Promotion at the Mexican federal Secretariat of Health, to identify possibilities for disseminating the materials vis-à-vis this connection. The General Director works on school food environments and coordinates the federal "School & Health" program which provides workshops and capacity building to create a culture of health and for disease prevention in primary schools. We are exploring if there is a way to incorporate our school food policy campaign materials into this program or any others, beginning with an offer for the Secretariat of Education to use the campaign materials online. We will continue to share our findings and policy recommendations with the federal government, including with the Inter-Secretarial Working Group on a Healthy, Just and Sustainable Food System which is seeking to adopt comprehensive policy measures to promote healthy food environments to combat all forms of malnutrition, including childhood overweight and obesity.
- We engaged with the Secretariat of Health of Mexico City who agreed to use the communications materials in 300 schools in Mexico City which are part of their "School & Health" program. A pilot intervention began in October 2019 with a training of 300 health promoters conducted by the El Poder del Consumidor school research team, the delivery of campaign kits with all of the communications materials (banners, booklets, flyers, flash drives with videos and reference materials, etc.) for a total of 300 schools, and the use of the materials in the first 100 schools. We are also working with the Mexico City government on the adaptation and use of El Poder del Consumidor's "Learn to Eat" poster campaign for use in the Mexico City subway, which includes a poster on a healthy school lunch in which we will mention the school food regulations to inform parents and the public of its existence.
- We have also met with the Secretariat of Health in San Luis Potosi, who wishes to incorporate the campaign materials into the "School and Health" program in their state as part of the "Health Promoting School Environment" component. In September 2019, we delivered 90 kits to support the use of these materials in 90 schools where the "School and Health" program is being carried out. We are currently in discussion with them to identify how and when the materials can best be used.

6. Learned Lessons, Problem Mitigation; What contributed to these outcomes?

- It was learned that "buy-in" from education and health authorities, including school principals, was key to creating change in the school food environment. Our relationships with authorities and maintenance of those relationships over the life of the project and during the transition from one administration to the next were essential in our efforts to gain access to the school community (during Phase I), to achieve dissemination of our communication materials (Phase II) and to scale-up their use in pilot interventions following the project. In fact, the main problems that arose during the project were related to the difficulty in gaining access to schools for the fieldwork and it was through developing these relationships that we were able to mitigate these access issues when we returned to the field to do pre-testing for our communications materials and ultimately begin collaborations with two state Secretariats of Health, who will further disseminate the campaign.
- Furthermore, "buy-in" from principals was also key because they were in charge of operational aspects of the school and thus their interest to utilize and share the communication materials in their school was and will be critical to creating change in the school environment.

- We reinforced our understanding of the importance of research allies during the course of this project, mainly through the conformation and regular consultation of the national and international members of our Expert Committee, as their insights helped to shape our project and ensure its relevance for the Mexican political and academic context.
- In addition, we learned the usefulness of pre-testing our campaigns with experts (authorities from the Ministry of Health, academics, activists) before finalizing campaign development and launch to complement insights from focus group interviews with the beneficiary target audiences. These expert interviews gave very useful strategic insights, with perspectives from their human rights, nutritional and public policy backgrounds, as well as complemented our own understanding of the political landscape at the time and advocacy implications and opportunities posed by the communications campaign.

IIX. OVERALL ASSESSMENT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Co-financing from Bloomberg Philanthropies:** There was great benefit from the co-financing that we received as it allowed us to develop and print additional materials and to carry out additional, media and advocacy activities that were not included in our IDRC project protocol but with had the objective to further disseminate and promote the results and materials generated with IDRC funds. This continued co-financing is permitting project continuity.
2. **Contribution to Development:** The project made contributions to development in that it promoted child health, quality educational environments, sustainable consumption practices and the prevention of obesity and non-communicable diseases, these are all objectives highlighted in the UN's 2030 Agenda on sustainable development.
3. **Learnings from this Experience:** We believe that creating multiple outputs—research, earned media, communications campaign, policy-advocacy—from a single research project is a very effective way of amplifying the impact of achieving a project objective so it is important to build the development of these outputs in from the beginning of project planning and to contemplate the real timeline and project investment to this end. We also appreciate more than ever that project timelines do not always coincide with the best timelines for strategic planning exercises. With a shifting political landscape due to the transition period and an incoming federal administration (coinciding with the project period), the political circumstances were uncertain for a full strategic planning exercise to be possible and of utility.
4. **Overall Project Experience:** This project was very enriching for our organization for multiple reasons, in particular because of the opportunity it afforded us to carry out a long-term research project to contribute to knowledge generation and to inform public campaigning and advocacy efforts. It was an extremely valuable experience as it allowed us to strengthen our research capacities and our ability to design research methods and fieldwork for advocacy purposes. Furthermore, our dialogues with the donor and organizations in the region and our relationship and knowledge exchange with other organizations enhanced our vision and practice.

ANNEX 1: ONLINE ACCESS TO SELECTED PROJECT MATERIALS

1. Research Reports/Policy Briefs

- Bahena L, Torres F, Calvillo A. (2018) *Resumen Ejecutivo: Explorando el ambiente escolar alimentario: barreras y facilitadores en la implementación de la regulación de la venta de alimentos y bebidas en escuelas primarias del centro de México*. El Poder del Consumidor: Mexico City. Available at: [file:///C:/Users/Usuario1-E%60PC/Downloads/Documento-ResumenEjecutivo-EscuelaSaludablesWEB%20\(15\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/Usuario1-E%60PC/Downloads/Documento-ResumenEjecutivo-EscuelaSaludablesWEB%20(15).pdf) **(Research Report documenting Phase I research)**
- Alianza por la Salud Alimentaria. (2018) *El ambiente escolar obesogénico en México: La necesidad de mejorar la regulación de la venta de alimentos y bebidas en escuelas*. Alianza por la Salud Alimentaria: Mexico City. Available at: [file:///C:/Users/EPC-X260%201/Downloads/PN4VfmyAlt4V_Hoja-informativa-Escuelas_web%20\(7\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/EPC-X260%201/Downloads/PN4VfmyAlt4V_Hoja-informativa-Escuelas_web%20(7).pdf) **(Policy Brief on School Food Regulation in Mexico)**

2. Article in United Nations Standing Committee on Nutrition (UNSCN) Journal

- Macari M, Bahena L, Torres F, Berner R, Calvillo A. (2019) *Improving the School Food Environment through Policy: A Case Study of Challenges and Recommendations from Mexico*. UNSCN Nutrition 44 (2019). United Nations Standing Committee on Nutrition: Rome. Available at: <https://www.unscn.org/en/resource-center/Unscn-news?idnews=1976>.

3. Webpages Dedicated to the Project on the My Healthy School Website

- El Poder del Consumidor y Red por los Derechos de la Infancia en México. (2019) *Explorando el ambiente escolar alimentario: Conoce los resultados de la investigación en Mi Escuela Saludable*. Available at: <https://miescuelasaludable.org/investigacionescuelas/> **(Web content describing Research Results)**
- El Poder del Consumidor y Red por los Derechos de la Infancia en México. (2019) *Acciones para lograr escuelas 100% libres de comida chatarra en Mi Escuela Saludable*. Available at: <https://miescuelasaludable.org/escuelaslibresdechatarra/> **(Web content describing the Communication Campaign)**

4. Communication Campaign Materials

- El Poder del Consumidor. (2019) *¿Conoces los alimentos y bebidas permitidos y no permitidos para la venta en las escuelas primarias?* El Poder del Consumidor: Mexico City. Available at: <https://miescuelasaludable.org/materiales-para-padres-de-familia-y-alumnos/> **(School Food Regulation Banner developed to inform school community about campaign)**
- El Poder del Consumidor. (2019) *¿Cómo lograr una alimentación saludable en las escuelas? Recomendaciones para la aplicación de la regulación de la venta de alimentos y bebidas*. El Poder del Consumidor: Mexico City. Available at: file:///C:/Users/EPC-X260%201/Downloads/como_lograr_una_alimentacion_saludable_en_las_escuelas_Versio_ndi_gital.pdf **(Informational Booklet to inform school directors and other authorities of their role in regulation and provide recommendations for actions to improve school food environments)**

5. Videos

- El Poder del Consumidor. (2018) *¿Por qué nuestras escuelas no son saludables?* El Poder del Consumidor: Mexico City. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VLyippwz-al> **(Video summarizing research results)**
- El Poder del Consumidor. (2019) *¿En la escuela de tus hijos todavía hay comida chatarra?* El Poder del Consumidor: Mexico City. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=4&v=90_VxtFwk7A **(Video highlighting central message of our communication campaign)**