

Non Communicable Diseases -The Elephant in the Room

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Abstract

Non Communicable Diseases including cardiovascular diseases, diabetes and cancer have been listed as the leading causes of death worldwide; they hamper development hence undermining the attainment development goals. Furthermore, they exacerbate social inequality. It is estimated that more than 60% of all deaths worldwide are caused by Non Communicable Diseases. NCDs had been perceived as diseases of the affluent, however, the prevalence in developing countries has increased over the years. In 2008 it was reported that four out of five NCD deaths occurred in low- and middle-income countries, an increase from what was reported earlier. According to a WHO report, NCD mortality rates in Africa are rising faster than anywhere else in the world. This paper reviews the causes, consequences and prevention strategies of NCDs.

The burden of NCDs in developing countries is driven by the negative effects of globalization, for example, unfair trade and irresponsible marketing, rapid and unplanned urbanization and increasingly sedentary lives. People in developing countries eat foods with higher levels of total energy. Increasing NCD levels are influenced by many factors including tobacco use and availability, consumption of foods high in salt, fat and sugar. A considerable proportion of global marketing targets children and adolescents as well as women in developing countries to promote tobacco smoking and consumption of 'junk' food and alcohol. Developing countries also experience rapid and unplanned urbanization which changes people's way of living through more exposure to the shared risk factors. NCDs are exacerbated in urban areas by changes in diet and physical activity, exposure to air pollutants (including tobacco smoke) and harmful use of alcohol.

NCDs are preventable and we need to talk about them everywhere and every time to help avert the menace. Lifestyle change is the panacea to NCD prevention and Management. Cessation of smoking, healthy diets and exercise are listed as some of the important strategies. Early this year the government of Rwanda declared a car free day as part of a campaign strategy for prevention of NCD. Governments must take up the elephant by its horns and sensitize people in addition to enacting legislative laws with an aim of preventing and managing the diseases. Control of these diseases will be a major milestone in achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDG).

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