



## **PROMOTE HEALTHY DIETS THROUGH LEGAL EMPOWERMENT AND SOCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY MECHANISMS, USING A HUMAN RIGHTS- BASED, PARTICIPATORY, AND MULTI- SECTORAL APPROACH**

**ACTIVITY: Makerere University School of public health seminar on regulatory and fiscal measures that promote healthy diets and the right to health.**

### **CONCEPT NOTE**

#### ***Background:***

The rise of noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) has become a global issue with high numbers of deaths registered worldwide at 41 million.<sup>1</sup> The top four NCDs that together account for most global deaths include; cardiovascular diseases (17.9 million), cancers (9 million), respiratory diseases (3.9 million) and diabetes (1.6 million)<sup>2</sup>. The World Health Organisation re-affirms this and states that each year, 15 million people die from NCDs between the age of 30 and 69 years and over 85% of these “premature” deaths occur in low-and middle-income countries.<sup>3</sup>

In Uganda alone, NCDs are estimated to account for 33% of the country’s annual deaths. According to the Parliamentary Forum on Non-communicable diseases, the number of Ugandans living with NCDs has been increasing dramatically and the probability of one dying between 30 and 70 years from NCDs is 21%.<sup>4</sup> NCDs cost individuals and the state highly, for instance in 2012/13 alone, UGX 2.5 billion was spent on open surgery and cardiac catheterization of only 2% of the patients at the Uganda Cancer Institute.<sup>5</sup>

Unhealthy diet is one of the major risk factors for noncommunicable diseases and WHO notes that 80% of premature NCD-deaths can be prevented through adoption of healthy eating lifestyles. Unhealthy diets occur when there is failure to consume fruits, vegetables, legumes, whole grains, nuts and seeds, calcium and fibers as well as high intake of red meat, processed meat, sugar-

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<sup>1</sup> Jean Joel Bigna- The Lancet Global Health: “The rising burden of noncommunicable diseases in sub-Saharan Africa” ‘published October 2019

<sup>2</sup> ibid

<sup>3</sup> WHO Newsroom fact sheet “Noncommunicable diseases”

<https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/noncommunicable-diseases>

<sup>4</sup> Parliamentary Forum on Noncommunicable diseases <http://www.parliament.go.ug/page/parliamentary-forum-non-communicable-diseases>

<sup>5</sup> ibid

sweetened beverages, trans-fatty acids, and sodium.<sup>6</sup> At an individual level, there is need to increase consumption of healthy diets and at government level, there is need for reformulation of legal and regulatory frameworks to regulate consumption of unhealthy diets and robust awareness to communities on the dangers of unhealthy diets and sedentary lifestyles

The UN Special Rapporteur on the right to health<sup>7</sup> while emphasizing General Comment No. 14 of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR): The Right to the Highest Attainable standard of Health (Art 12)<sup>8</sup> notes that the right to health is an inclusive right extending not only to timely and appropriate health care but also to the underlying determinants of health, such as an adequate supply of safe food and nutrition. The obligation of states includes ensuring equal access for all to nutritiously safe food as an underlying determinant of health. Further, to combat the growing burden of NCDs effectively, in line with the right to health, states must address preventable risk factors that lead to premature morbidity and mortality so as to enable all people to achieve the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health.

### **Justification:**

As stated above, NCDs have become a global concern with increasing deaths both globally and countrywide. The economic impact, including loss of income by people harmed by NCDs, the costs of treatment and the impacts on families threaten international development. Through regulation and fiscal reforms, countries can promote healthy diets, physical activity, and other initiatives reducing the prevalence and harms of NCDs.<sup>9</sup>

In light of the foregoing, the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Ministry of Health have been implementing the Global Regulatory & Fiscal Capacity Building Programme for promoting Healthy Diets and Physical Activity (Global RECAP). In Uganda, the priority areas selected by Country Team and Ministry of Health focuses on four policy areas including; nutrition labelling, restriction of marketing of foods and non-alcoholic beverages to children, promotion of physical activity and fiscal policies for diet, in particular effective sugar sweetened beverage taxation.

According to report of the Needs Assessment conducted prior to commencement of implementation of the RECAP Project, it was noted that the government of Uganda has made some efforts towards prevention of NCDs however there has been limited multi-sectoral collaboration

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<sup>6</sup> See FAO/WHO Second International Conference on Nutrition (ICN2) and the National Centre for Biotechnology Information article: 'Transforming the food system to fight noncommunicable diseases'

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6349221/>

<sup>7</sup> Statement by the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to health on the adoption of front-of-package warning labelling to tackle NCDs, available at

<https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=26130&LangID=E>

<sup>8</sup> CESCR General Comment No. 14: The Right to the Highest Attainable Standard of Health (Art. 12), Adopted at the Twenty – second Session of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, on 11 August 2000.

<sup>9</sup> Global RECAP: Capacity building to prevent NCDs. Available at <https://www.idlo.int/what-we-do/initiatives/global-recap-capacity-building-prevent-ncds>

and participation to tackle this problem. In addition, there are also limitations in cross-sectional knowledge, for example there is limited collaboration between law and public health sectors to develop understanding of the role of law in public health and there is limited public awareness on the same.

The Center for Food and Adequate Living Rights (CEFROHT) with support from International Development Law Organization (IDLO), is implementing a sub-project on advocacy under the Global RECAP to promote healthy diets through legal empowerment and social accountability mechanisms, using human rights-based approach, participatory, and multi-sectoral approach. This subproject is targeted towards strengthened human rights-based initiatives and community education to support regulatory and fiscal measures that promote healthy diets. It is on this basis that CEFROHT intends to hold a seminar at the School of Public Health Makerere University on engaging students, lecturers, and public health specialists.

**Objective of the seminar:**

The seminar is intended to strengthen collaboration among the academia and create awareness on using the law to promote healthy diets, using a human rights-based approach to specifically prevent noncommunicable diseases in Uganda.

**Expected outputs:**

- A clear understanding of how the law can be used to prevent the rise of diet related noncommunicable diseases in Uganda.
- Increased level of awareness of the academia on legal and policy options and strategies to promote healthy diets through legal empowerment.
- Strengthened partnerships and advocacy initiatives towards regulatory and fiscal measures that promote healthy diets through social accountability.