

WARNING BELLS OVER RISING CASES OF OBESITY

Guardian Respondent;;

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*IDRC Grant/ Subvention du CRDI: 108657-001-The Potential Effects of Sugar-Sweetened
Beverages Tax on Obesity Prevalence in Tanzania*

WFP warns displaced Mozambicans risk facing food crisis, calls for help

MAPUTO

THE United Nations World Food programme is warning that hundreds of displaced people in Mozambique risk facing an imminent food crisis. A violent campaign launched by Islamic extremists in the oil-rich Cabo Delgado province has led to a rapidly escalating humanitarian crisis.

Women and children are particularly reeling under pressure. Viazé Nassir was forced to flee her village in Quissanga District after an attack by insurgents in September 2020.

After a harrowing escape, the 41-year-old now lives at Metuge camp, with her injured husband, three surviving children and four grandchildren.

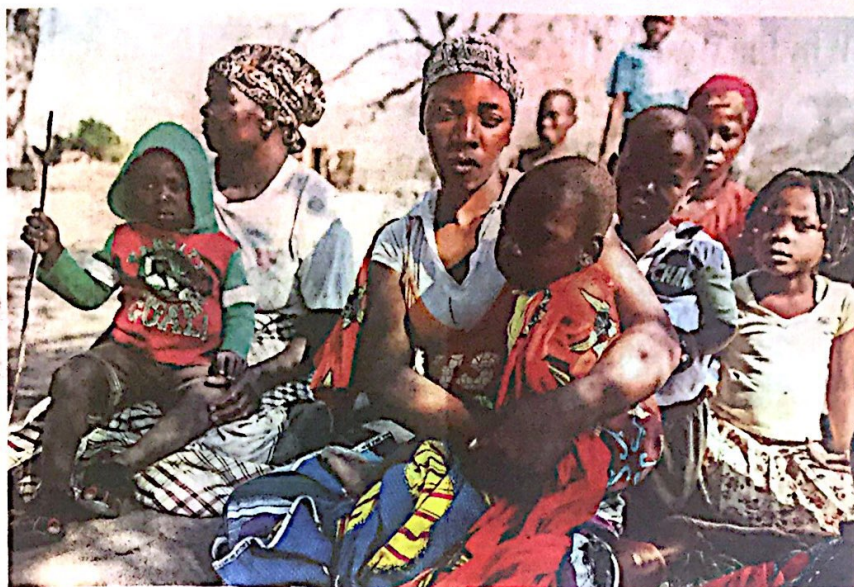
"They started shooting and attacking the village. At that moment, this baby was sleeping in the house. I went inside the house to take the baby, and they came in. When I picked up the baby, they shouted, 'They stop, we will kill you! Stop we will kill you!' I begged, I said no, please don't kill us", Nassir recalled.

Many of those who fled the insurgency in Palma to neighboring districts are being hosted by the local communities. However, the extra mouths to feed are putting pressure on families and host communities.

"I would like my children to grow up and study, to help me and help each other because I am without alternatives. In our land, we produced and sold food to support our children's school costs and here that no longer happens, we just stay. These are my children and they have no other family members, so they just depend on me. I feel even more sorry at other times for knowing that these children had a family and help, but today they no longer have help", Nassir said.

On Tuesday, the WFP said it might suspend food assistance completely, unless it raises \$121 million to help thousands of people, as families are totally reliant on humanitarian support.

"This was a tourism area, fishing, good economy, people had a good way of life but guess what? Insurgents, terrorists come in rip families apart, burning their homes, killing people, raping women, just exploiting a good



way of life and so the World Food Programme is now in here trying to bring hope to people...715,000 people that we are now supporting", said WFP Executive Director, David Beasley.

Children are worst affected by the

rising rates of malnutrition in Mozambique. Almost 21% of displaced children under 5 years old, and 18% of children of host families, are underweight. That's according to a recent survey by UNICEF and WFP.

Also, the rates of chronic malnutrition, which has lifelong ramifications, are at an alarming 50% of displaced children and 41% of children from host communities, the survey revealed.

The UN says the displacement has left at least 730,000 people in

Cabo Delgado with no access to their lands and no means of earning a living. It added that 363,000 are expected to be deemed by the UN as "highly food insecure" come the lean season beginning in October.

Kenya in rush to vaccinate 4m children as measles cases surge

By Peter Muiruri

KENYA has restarted its vaccination programme in an effort to tackle the re-emergence of measles, which has surged in the country during the Covid-19 restrictions.

A 10-day campaign against highly contagious measles and rubella has begun to target 4 million children aged nine months to five years in 22 of Kenya's 47 counties where outbreaks are highest.

Measles is the "third most common cause of deaths

among children from vaccine-preventable diseases", the health ministry said. In 2020, only 85% of children in the east African country had received the first "dose" of the "vaccine" and less than 50% had had the second.

The exercise will involve 16,000 health workers at 5,061 vaccination centres.

An assessment conducted in Kenya with the support of the World Health Organization showed a big rise in the number of unvaccinated children. "The unprecedented increase

in the number of unvaccinated children, accumulation of susceptible children to more than 2.1 million and the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic has aided outbreaks", the ministry said.

According to the WHO, it takes at least 95% of the combined MCV1 and MCV2 vaccine coverage to prevent outbreaks. Across sub-Saharan Africa, however, the level of first doses being administered has stagnated at 69% since 2013. "Only seven countries in the region achieved 95% measles-containing vaccine coverage in

2019", the WHO said.

Kenya's 4 million children are among 166 million in Africa who missed supplemental vaccination against measles between January 2020 and April 2021, according to the WHO.

In April, the WHO reported of major outbreaks of measles in eight African countries that affected "tens of thousands" as efforts to contain Covid took centre stage.

"Children under five years can die from measles complications and if the virus circula-

tion is not stopped, their risk of exposure increases daily. We know that vaccination is by far the best way to keep these children safe," said Mamza Zaman, UNICEF representative in Kenya.

The WHO also reported that the "quality of measles surveillance in Africa fell to the lowest level in seven years in 2020, with just 11 countries meeting their target".

Dr Mashidiso Moeti, WHO regional director for Africa, said: "Recent outbreaks of measles, but also yellow fe-

ver, cholera and meningitis, all point to worrying gaps in immunisation coverage and surveillance in Africa. As we fight Covid-19, we cannot leave anyone dangerously exposed to preventable diseases. I urge all countries to double down on essential health services, including life-saving vaccination campaigns."

According to the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the number of global measles cases more than quadrupled to the highest in 23 years, from 132,490 in 2016 to

869,770 in 2019. Mortality rates almost doubled, with 207,500 reported deaths.

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Warning bells over rising cases of obesity

By Guardian Correspondent

A new study conducted by the Economic and Social Research Foundation (ESRF) has shown that obesity cases are rising in Tanzania, increasing the risk of non-communicable diseases.

The study shows that if no action is taken the situation will impose heavy economic burden on individuals, families and the government.

The Economic and Social Research Foundation (ESRF) in their report following the research calls for urgent policy intervention by the government to arrest the trend.

It says has led to upsurge of non-communicable diseases (NCDs). Apart from the ever rising death toll from the NCDs, individual patients incur medical and non-medical costs totalling 1,211.78 US dollars annually, on average, as well as indirect costs such as loss of income, according to the report.

The cost to the government of caring for NCD patients nearly doubled from 142.7 million dollars in 2015 to 280.6 million dollars in 2019/20.

Obesity and NCDs are a global concern. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), 39 percent of the global adult population or 1.9 billion people were overweight in 2016 while 13 percent (650 million people) were obese. Some 41 million children under five years were also diagnosed overweight or obese.

The research by the policy think tank found that five percent of Tanzania's adult population had this excessive weight in 2008, but this rose to 8.4 percent in 2016 whereas deaths from NCDs accounted for a

third of all deaths. Obesity was reported to be higher among females (27 percent) than men (4.1 percent) and it affects the age group 45-54 years most.

Lack of community awareness on NCDs and the government's concentration on curative care services rather than preventive measures is blamed for the continued growth of the diseases.

The study led by Professor Fortunata Songora Makene, ESRF's Head of Strategic Research and Publications Department, found that 97 percent of the government's total health service budget was spent on caring for NCD patients and only three percent went to management of the diseases.

Obesity is the accumulation of excessive body fat, which is largely the result of habitual consumption of high caloric foods and drinks. The ESRF research, sponsored by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) of Canada, built its analysis on the already established strong effect of Sugar-Sweetened Beverages (SSBs) on weight gain and found them strongly related.

Obese people are in turn vulnerable to developing non-communicable ailments, such as cardiovascular complications, diabetes and various cancers.

To discourage the consumption of SSBs, in addition to calling for multi-sectoral measures to promote healthy eating and physical activity, the study report recommends an increase on the excise tax charged, equivalent to 20 percent of the current price of sugar-sweetened soft drinks and juices, as a policy intervention measure.



"The SSB tax already exists. The proposed reform is that of increasing the tax rate rather than introducing a new tax," says the report.

The study found that middle-aged adults consumed high intake of sugary drinks, concluding that imposition of tax would help lower the intake, thereby reducing obesity prevalence by 6.6 percent overall.

The researchers recommend consultation with SSB manufacturers, consumers and other stakeholders on the proposal to ensure inclusive implementation.

The report gives evidence that the fiscal policy intervention has proved effective in many countries, including South Africa, India, Brazil, Denmark, France, United Kingdom and Bulgaria.

This is the first such study in Eastern Africa and second only to one carried out in South Africa on the continent.

Raising the excise tax on sugar-sweetened drinks by 20 percent of the price would not only complement other measures to reduce obesity but will also boost government revenues by an additional 452bn/- annually.

SADC and UNICEF strategies to expand education, skills development and employment opportunities for youth

By Guardian Reporter

THE Southern African Development Community (SADC) Executive Secretary, Dr Stergomena Tax has said that member states are committed to promoting youth empowerment through on-going regional programmes as they play an active role in the implementation of regional policies and activities through their established structures.

Dr Tax was speaking during a courtesy call by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) senior advisor for partnerships and resource mobilisation under the Generation Unlimited (GenU) movement, Nadi Albino.

The courtesy call saw the two discussing collaborative initiatives to empower young people to become productive and engaged members of society in the SADC Region.

Under the overall coordination of UNICEF, GenU is a global multi-sector partnership to meet the urgent need for expanded education, training and employment opportunities for young people aged 10 to 24 years.

Dr Tax stated that the region's established programmes on skills development, employment and youth empowerment, which promote realisation of the demographic dividend, were closely aligned to GenU objectives.

She welcomed the appointment of His Excellency Dr Mokgweetsi Eric Keabetswe Masisi, President of the Republic of Botswana, as a GenU champion within the SADC region and expressed confidence that this positive development would unlock new empowerment opportunities for young people in Botswana, and the Region at large.

She underscored the need to ensure synergy and complementarity among key actors, notably the youth themselves, in addressing the many challenges they faced and ensuring their full contribution to the socio-economic development agenda.

Meanwhile, Albino informed the Executive Secretary that by virtue of its existence, GenU was mandated by UNICEF to bring together the private sector, governments, multilateral organisations, civil society, and young people through mutual and cordial engagements in finding lasting solutions to challenges faced by millions of young people.

She outlined the work conducted by GenU under different workstreams to modernise education and training and foster job preparation through apprenticeship, mentorship and entrepreneurship; to increase work and livelihood opportunities available to youth, and to engage youth as change makers.

Albino mentioned that the private sector and young people were key players in these initiatives, expressing optimism that partnership with SADC would go a long way in creating an enabling environment for the GenU initiative.

The parties acknowledged and underscored that young people in the SADC region and the rest of the world represented enormous opportunities to transform economic and social outcomes, thus it was critical to invest in young people with a view to enhance productivity and standards of living at regional, continental and global levels.

The parties committed to establish cooperation modalities to implement responsive interventions to address challenges facing youth in the Region.