

Planning a programme for healthy living through schools in Kenya

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Introduction: Health promotion plays a key role in averting type 2 diabetes (T2D) and related non-communicable diseases (NCDs) by empowering communities on healthy living and risk factor management. However, many low- and middle-income countries are still focused on infectious diseases. This paper outlines the design of an on-going project aimed at using primary school pupils and teachers as behaviour change agents in their communities to promote healthy living for primary prevention of NCDs in Kenya.

Method: The project addresses modifiable risk factors for T2D and related NCDs such as healthy diets and physical activity as key variables for healthy living. It comprises of three phases: 1) an initial explorative intervention development in four schools; 2) an iterative cycle scaling up and including another 12 schools representing national diversity; and 3) development of a model for a school health programme to be disseminated nationally. The project adopts a whole school approach targeting pupils, teachers, parents, school management, community members, and relevant education and health authorities. Each phase is coupled with monitoring, evaluation and documentation of lessons learnt. The protocol adopts a participatory, pupil-centred approach to raise diabetes and related NCDs awareness among pupils and adults. Class 5 pupils, aged 10 to 12 years, and their teachers are trained as peer educators and trainers of trainers, respectively.

Result: Results from this intervention will contribute to the development of a feasible and sustainable Kenyan educational school health promotion model addressing primary prevention of T2D and related NCDs. It is anticipated that such a model can be adapted for use in other low- and middle-income countries in the region. Expected outputs from this intervention are increased knowledge, action competence and health promotion capacity among pupils and teachers. Additionally, increased awareness of the role of healthy lifestyles in the prevention of T2D and related NCDs should motivate adoption of healthy practices by those reached by the project.

Conclusion: This school-mediated programme that promotes healthy living is expected to contribute to curbing the increase of T2D and related NCDs in Kenya in present and future generations.

Keywords: Non communicable diseases, healthy living, schools, Kenya