Bending the Curve in Africa’s Nutrition Transition

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Worldwide nutrition transition
Worldwide nutrition transition

• 1 billion undernourished, 1 billion overweight
• Since 2007, overweight > underweight
• Undernutrition and overnutrition coexist.
• Even in Africa!
Africa’s double burden:
Percent of Adult Females Under- and Overweight

Overweight > Underweight

Source: WHO (2013)

Underweight BMI < 18.5
Overweight MMI > 25
Causes of the nutrition transition

• Income growth
  → large calorie increases
  → higher red meat and fat consumption

• Urbanization
  → less physical activity
  → increased processed foods
Role of processed foods

- Survival instincts: humans hard-wired to crave sugar, fat and salt
- In excess,
  - salt $\rightarrow$ hypertension
  - sugar $\rightarrow$ obesity, diabetes
  - fat $\rightarrow$ cardiovascular diseases
- Food processing technology
  - Salt $\rightarrow$ food preservation, taste enhancer
  - Sugar $\rightarrow$ preservative qualities, taste enhancer
  - Fat sells
Consequences

• Obesity
• Hypertension
• Heart disease
• Diabetes
• Dental disease
• Reduced life expectancy
• Lower worker productivity
• Rising public health system costs
Rapid rise of dental disease

Rural Ecuador, 1978

2011

Source: Sokal-Gutierrez (2013).
Africa’s choices

Source: Sokal-Gutierrez (2013).
Africa’s challenges

• Double burden: under and over-nutrition
• Linked burdens? → thrifty phenotype
• Oral health
• Accelerating time frame
Africa’s latecomer advantages

• Last continent to urbanize
• Last continent to undergo the nutrition transition
• African can learn from the experiences and mistakes of wealthier countries
Bending the curve

Income, Urbanization

Macro Nutrients

100%

Default trajectory
Bending the curve

Macro
Nutrients

Income, Urbanization

100%

Default trajectory
Bending the curve

Macro Nutrients

Income, Urbanization

100%

Default trajectory

Preferred trajectory

100%

Income, Urbanization
Discussion questions: What steps, taken now, might enable Africans to improve public health outcomes of the coming nutrition transition?

- Private sector actions?
- Public sector actions?
- Key lessons from elsewhere?
References


