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Clarification on the Etiology of Type 2 Diabetes and a Call for Responsible Public Health Communication

PRESS RELEASE

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From: The Uganda National Civil Society Coalition on Front of Pack Warning Labelling

1. Introduction

The Uganda National Civil Society Coalition on Front of pack Warning Labelling (UNCC-FOPWL) issues this statement to address and correct recent misinformation stemming from a New Vision article published on July 30, 2025, titled **“Staple Foods Causing Diabetes.”** While we support all efforts to raise public awareness about the growing burden of Type 2 Diabetes (T2D), the framing of this article’s title and some contents is scientifically inaccurate. It risks creating unnecessary public panic, stigmatizing nutritious and culturally significant traditional foods, and misrepresenting the current scientific understanding of T2D etiology. This document serves to set the record straight and provide evidence-based strategic guidance for the public, media, and policymakers.

2. The Scientific Etiology of Type 2 Diabetes: A Multifactorial Condition

It is imperative to understand that Type 2 Diabetes is a complex, multifactorial metabolic disorder. It does not arise from a single cause, nor is it directly attributable to the consumption of traditional staple foods. The development of T2D is influenced by a complex interplay of genetic, behavioral, social, and environmental factors. The primary contributors, supported by extensive scientific evidence, include lifestyle behaviors that lead to insulin resistance. These behaviors are the excessive consumption of ultra-processed foods, which are high in refined sugars, unhealthy fats, and salt, and leading a sedentary lifestyle with insufficient physical activity.

Furthermore, factors such as tobacco use, excessive (binge) alcohol consumption, chronic stress, and being overweight or obese significantly impair insulin sensitivity and pancreatic function. Genetic predisposition and family history also play a crucial role, increasing an individual’s susceptibility. A recent study by Kiguli et al. (2025) in the Busia and Bugiri districts, cited by the media house (New Vision), correctly emphasizes the influence of social and cultural norms on eating habits but does not conclude that traditional staple foods are a direct cause of T2D. The research highlights that risk is compounded by a lack of dietary diversity and modern lifestyle factors, not the foods themselves.

3. The Foundational Role of Traditional Staple Foods in a Healthy Diet

Traditional Ugandan staple foods such as matooke, cassava, millet, and beans are nutrient-dense and form the foundation of a balanced, healthy diet. These foods are integral to our nation’s food culture and nutritional security and are not inherently dangerous. The public health challenge arises not from these staples, but from dietary imbalances. These imbalances include the over-reliance on single food types, particularly refined carbohydrates, and the insufficient intake of diverse vegetables, fruits, and proteins. The true threat lies in the increasing displacement of these wholesome, indigenous foods by aggressively marketed, convenient, and ultra-processed products that are high in added sugars, trans fats, and salt/ sodium.

4. Strategic Public Health Recommendations for Diabetes Prevention

To effectively combat the rise of Type 2 Diabetes and other non-communicable diseases in Uganda, the UNCC urges the public to adopt targeted, evidence-based preventive measures. These actions are critical for fostering long-term health and well-being:

- **Prioritize a Diverse and Balanced Diet:** Emphasize the consumption of whole, indigenous foods. A healthy plate should include a rich variety of vegetables, fruits, legumes, and whole grains. It is crucial to avoid reliance on a single staple food and instead embrace dietary diversity.
- **Limit Ultra-Processed Products:** Significantly reduce the intake of sugary beverages, fried snacks, packaged foods, and other items high in refined sugars, unhealthy fats, and salt.
- **Engage in Regular Physical Activity:** Incorporate at least 30 minutes of moderate physical activity into your daily routine. This helps maintain a healthy weight, improves insulin sensitivity, and enhances overall metabolic health.
- **Avoid Harmful Habits:** Cease tobacco use and limit alcohol consumption, as both are significant modifiable risk factors for T2D and other chronic conditions.
- **Promote Mental Well-being:** Reduce chronic stress, which can negatively impact metabolic health, and prioritize mental wellness as a key component of a healthy lifestyle.
- **Undergo Regular Health Screenings:** Early detection is crucial for effective management and prevention. Regular medical check-ups to monitor blood glucose, weight, and other metabolic indicators are vital, especially for individuals with a family history of diabetes.

5. A Call for Responsible Science Communication and Journalism

UNCC-FOPWL calls upon all media outlets and public health communicators to uphold the principles of responsible science communication. Accurate reporting is essential to prevent the spread of misinformation that can undermine public health efforts. We urge journalists to consult qualified health and nutrition experts before publishing on complex scientific topics, to avoid sensationalist headlines that evoke unnecessary fear, and to focus on providing actionable, evidence-based solutions. Promoting scientific literacy is a shared responsibility that is vital for empowering our communities to make informed health decisions. The UNCC-FOPWL welcomes collaboration and is available to provide expert input on future stories involving non-communicable diseases and nutrition.

6. Our Commitment to a Healthier Uganda

The UNCC remains steadfast in its commitment to advancing nutrition science and empowering Ugandan communities with accurate, culturally relevant information. We will continue to work collaboratively with communities, healthcare workers, researchers, and policymakers to deliver practical solutions for diabetes prevention and care. By fostering a holistic understanding of T2D risk factors and promoting sustainable health behaviors, we can collectively combat misinformation, reduce stigma, and build a healthier nation through balanced diets, active lifestyles, and informed policy decisions.



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