

Food Habits of Nepali City Kids

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A few months ago I was invited by a close friend of mine for a dinner in a newly opened Pizza hut in the country. I was amazed by the voracity of the eight old year son of one of my friend. Despite my friend persistent requests to limit his intakes, the boy, her only baby, ate one medium size thick crust chicken pizza with extra cheese topping and gulped a large Pepsi. Besides, he took two ice-creams as dessert. Although his mom felt very embarrassed witnessing this, I seriously doubted the food habits she inculcated in him.

A recent study finding which used data from more than 200 countries between 1980 and 2008 showed steadily increasing prevalence of obesity epidemic in countries of every region. The trend is evident in high, middle and low income countries. Nepal is experiencing growing urbanization and associated changes in lifestyles. City kids are quickly disappearing from playgrounds, rather to be found as couch potatoes in front of their television screens for hours, or glued to their computer chairs. Their fiber, protein and carbohydrate rich usual diets are gradually being replaced by readymade high-fat and high- sugar content foods.

Studies have indicated that the concept of instant ready-to-eat foodstuff has led to proliferation of processed foods stuffed with unhealthy ingredients like added sugar, fats, salt, enhancers, etc. The cheap marketing tactics, common in countries like Nepal where regulatory and enforcement mechanisms as still weak, have been proven to be very effective especially among children—the most vulnerable lot to obesity.

For instance, the instant noodle advertorials claiming that they are loaded with vitamins and other nutrients have been successful in wooing school children to secure a guaranteed space for noodles in their tiffin boxes. The government's recent decision of imposing a ban on junk food in schools shall therefore be applauded. Inclusion of nutrition, physical activity and obesity prevention in the school curricula could just be an immediate step to complement obesity prevention. Given the fact that most of the development organizations are currently following approaches such as the Community-led Total Sanitation (CLTS) and School-led Total Sanitation (SLTS) in their sanitation projects, obesity-related interventions can easily be aligned with these approaches.

Governments have a crucial role to play in order to prevent people food habits. Lack of visioning of the Nepal government was evident when we missed the opportunity of gathering data on physical activity and dietary intake by excluding these items in the

national census of 2011.

Another threat for Nepal is, non-communicable diseases are not high on our agenda. Nepal's health policy prioritizes infectious diseases due to the fact that these are the major causes of child mortality. There still exist rooms for improvement, as a certain studies have found that food habits, particularly during childhood disappear later depending on the eating behaviors and physical activities subsequently followed. The challenge, thus, largely remains with all others who have the responsibility to ensure that we and our children keep healthy.