The Harvard School of Public Health Multidisciplinary International Research Training (HSPH MIRT) Program, Addis Continental Institute of Public Health (ACIPH) and International Clinical Laboratories (ICL) hosted a first of its kind non-communicable disease symposium on November 8, 2012 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

The symposium was attended by a diverse group of health professionals, researchers, and professionals from governmental and non-governmental organizations. Non-communicable diseases (NCDs), in particular cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, cancers, and chronic respiratory diseases, have become the major cause of morbidity and mortality globally. NCDs account for two thirds of all deaths globally, more than double the number of deaths caused by infectious diseases, maternal and prenatal conditions, and nutritional deficiencies combined. Moreover, contrary to common misperception, the burden of NCDs is worst in low- and middle-income countries where 80% of all NCDs occur. In sub-Saharan African countries such as Ethiopia, increased urbanization and changing lifestyle have contributed to the rise in NCDs.

During the symposium, staff members from HSPH MIRT, ACIPH and ICL shared results of collaborative studies that have been conducted among urban dwellers in Ethiopia in the past three years. It was shown that the magnitude of cardiovascular risk factors was high among study participants and obesity was found to be an emerging problem particularly among women. Approximately 20% of participants were found to be hypertensive and 6.5% of them diabetics. In addition, the burden of mental health problems among young adults was particularly high.

Professor Yemane Berhane, Director of ACIPH welcoming participants and opening the workshop
The guest of honor, Dr. Keseteberhan Admassu (now Minister of Health) discussed the activities that the Ethiopian Federal Ministry of Health are undertaking to strengthen the health workforce at a community level and combat the growing problem of NCDs.

Following the guest of honor, Professor Michelle Williams provided an overview about the growing problems of NCDs and how they have serious implications on economic development in Ethiopia. Dr. Williams highlighted the importance of promoting interventions to reduce and control NCD risk factors. She also discussed the importance of establishing and strengthening national policies and plans for the prevention and control of chronic disease. She noted how public and private partnerships for NCD prevention and control will be critical. Dr. Williams is the Stephen B. Kay Family Professor of Public Health and Chair of the Department of Epidemiology at the Harvard School of Public Health.

The keynote speaker, Professor Srinath Reddy, President of the Public Health Foundation of India, shared insights and best practices for early detection and prevention programs in low and middle income countries. In his remarks, Dr. Reddy noted how the growing burden of NCDs is contributing to loss of productivity, premature deaths and high health care costs. Furthermore, he noted that multi-sectorial and population wide efforts are critical for combating the major determinants of NCDs. Dr. Reddy is the President of World Heart Federation and the first Bernard Lown Visiting Professor of Cardiovascular Health at the Harvard School of Public Health.

Finally, Mr. Alemayehu Bekele, a representative from the Ethiopian Public Health Association discussed the role of advocacy particularly the work that EPHA is doing to address NCDs. Mr. Alemayehu discussed how EPHA uses mass media and billboard messages to increase awareness of NCD prevention efforts.

The workshop included a panel discussion where participants explored options for moving forward with NCD prevention in Ethiopia.
Below we present a list of selected research papers that were presented at the symposium. Please click on the link below the title to read the abstracts.

Prevalence of Metabolic Syndrome among Working Adults in Ethiopia

Comparison of Measures of Adiposity in Identifying Cardiovascular Disease Risk Among Ethiopian Adults

Prevalence of Hypertension and Diabetes among Ethiopian Adults

Hematological Parameters and Metabolic Syndrome: Findings From an Occupational Cohort in Ethiopia

Laboratory Reference Values of Complete Blood Count for Apparently Healthy Adults in Ethiopia

Migraine and Psychiatric Comorbidities among Sub-Saharan African Adults

Prevalence and Correlates of Mental Distress among Working Adults in Ethiopia