Towards a continuum of healthcare interventions: integrating non-communicable disease prevention into maternal and neonatal care

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Project Update

According to the United Nations Population Fund, urbanization has the potential to usher in a new era of well-being, resource efficiency and economic growth. At the same time, cities are also home to high concentrations of poverty. Nowhere is the rise of inequality clearer than in urban areas, where wealthy communities coexist alongside, and separate from, slums and informal settlements. Currently over 250 million people living in urban slums suffer from non-communicable diseases (NCDs), such as diabetes and cardiovascular disease. Slum dwellers are often not formally recognised and consequently receive little governmental support for healthcare services, especially for long-term conditions such as NCDs.

This project focuses on improving current models of healthcare delivery for marginalised communities. Specifically, we are looking for effective ways of integrating NCDs prevention and care into maternal & child care infrastructures. This is a promising health delivery approach that has been advocated by the World Health Organisation; however, specific execution mechanisms remain under-researched and poorly defined.

In the first half of 2015 we worked with an Indian NGO, the Centre for the Study of Social Change, to conduct structured interviews with 549 slum dwellers from 19 slum areas in Bandra, Mumbai, India. The data collection process was designed with the following objectives: (1) collect evidence on NCD awareness and self-reported prevalence in a slum population; (2) collect evidence on current access to both maternal health and NCD health services. This study revealed important insights regarding the socio-economic status of participants, with most households earning below Rs 12,000 (£120) monthly and less than 10% of the interviewed women having control over the family finances. General awareness of diabetes of cardiovascular disease was high; yet, nearly 50% of the people suffering from hypertension did not know where to get regular care from. The study found strong demand for maternal care amongst participants but provision was seen to be highly fragmented, with different services accessed through a wide range of public and private providers. Findings will be made available in a journal publication in early 2016.