

# International Workshop on The Politics of Non-Communicable Diseases in the Global South

2-3 October 2015  
King's College London

Over the last ten years, there has been mounting alarm about the growing non-communicable diseases (NCDs) epidemic in the global South and the health and economic burden it represents. International organisations like the WHO, the World Bank and UNDP, for example, have published numerous reports and global action plans to tackle this new epidemic. Likewise, governments have expressed concern about this rising threat, recently passing a *Political Declaration on the Prevention and Control of NCDs* at a High-Level Meeting at the United Nations' General Assembly. Public health experts, too, have called for more attention to be paid to this new epidemic, as illustrated by *The Lancet's* frequent special issues on the topic. Last but not least, health charities and patient organisations have also voiced their anxiety and recently established, with the support of the pharmaceutical industry, the NCD Alliance to campaign for action to tackle the chronic disease epidemic in low and middle-income countries (LMICs).

As these different actors have repeatedly argued, NCDs – usually defined as comprising four conditions (cardiovascular disease, cancer, diabetes and chronic respiratory disorders) related to four behavioural risk factors (diet, physical activity, smoking and alcohol) – have become a critical issue for LMICs. Drawing on complex epidemiological data, they point out that more than 60% of deaths worldwide are NCD-related and nearly 80% of these deaths occur in these countries. Such a high prevalence of NCDs, they argue, constitutes one of the major challenges for development in the twenty-first century. On one hand, NCDs are viewed as a negative consequence of socio-economic development, with economic growth and rapid urbanisation having led to the rise of modern lifestyles like smoking and drinking. On the other hand, NCDs are understood to be a serious threat to future development through both their negative impact on the productivity of working age populations and the double burden of disease they place on already overstretched health systems. Predictably perhaps, many of the solutions put forward by these actors are health strategies successfully used in North America and Europe and which are deemed commensurate with the economic context of LMICs, including epidemiological surveillance systems and cost-effective interventions like tobacco taxation, campaigns for healthier diets and multidrug regimens for cardiovascular diseases.

While there is a growing public health body of literature on NCDs in the global South, the interventions by more critical social science researchers have, with some notable exceptions, been sparse. Organised by the Department of Social Science, Health and Medicine at King's College London and the School of Geography at Queen Mary University

of London, and funded by both the Wellcome Trust and the UK Economic and Social Research Council, this workshop is a first step towards addressing this gap. Bringing together political scientists, anthropologists, historians, sociologists, geographers as well as public health experts and advocates, it will offer a great opportunity to question, examine and make sense of current initiatives to problematise and govern the chronic disease epidemic in emerging economies. Among others, the workshop will explore the making of chronic disease as a problem of development in international forums and across countries of the global South. It will, in particular, examine the narratives through which the problem is framed and analyse the techniques like epidemiological models and maps that make it possible to view chronic diseases as a development issue. The workshop will also consider the influence of the tobacco, alcohol and food companies in globalising risk factors associated with NCDs as well as the role of the pharmaceutical industry and philanthropic foundations in creating drug markets for chronic diseases in the global South. Last but not least, the workshop will also investigate the way health advocates and patient groups in the global South translate, resist and re-appropriate the international public health strategies that aim to mitigate against the epidemic in the global South.

**When?** Friday 2 (5–7.45 PM) and Saturday 3 (9 AM–4 PM) October 2015. **Where?** King's College London, Strand Campus, London, United Kingdom. **Funding:** Wellcome Trust and the UK Economic and Social Research Council. **Organisers:** Dr David Reubi (Department of Social Science, Health and Medicine, King's College London, [david.reubi@kcl.ac.uk](mailto:david.reubi@kcl.ac.uk)), Dr Tim Brown (School of Geography, Queen Mary University of London, [tim.brown@qmul.ac.uk](mailto:tim.brown@qmul.ac.uk)), Nele Jensen (Department of Sociology, Goldsmiths University of London, [n.jensen@gold.ac.uk](mailto:n.jensen@gold.ac.uk)) and Doerte Bemme (Department of Social Studies of Medicine, McGill University, [doerte.bemme@mail.mcgill.ca](mailto:doerte.bemme@mail.mcgill.ca)).

