By Francis Byaruhanga;

Non-communicable disease risk factors continue to present a significant challenge to communities, as highlighted in the recent survey conducted by the NCD Alliance.

The report underscores that non-communicable disease risk factors pose a considerable threat to the younger population within the working age group and society as a whole. Specifically, the findings of the Mobile Phone Survey, targeting individuals between 18 and 67 years old, shed light on areas requiring urgent attention for the enhancement of alcohol and tobacco prevention and control efforts.

These insights are crucial for informing Rwanda's Ministry of Health and other stakeholders about the imperative need for improvement in tackling these pressing health concerns.

Rwanda introduced TUNYWELESS last year, a policy aimed at promoting public health, safety, and productivity, as well as fostering a culture of sobriety among citizens. However, the study indicate that existing challenges persist, suggesting the need for additional mechanisms to be implemented.

Illustration from the report indicates that "Overall, two in five (41.9%) reported alcohol consumption in the past year, and 12.5% reported daily use with approximately one in three adult Rwandans reported consuming alcohol in the past 30 days (30.8%)."

"Less than 6% of adult Rwandans reported drinking six or more drinks on one occasion, and drinking with friends or family as well as a celebration or party were the primary reasons for consuming multiple drinks at one time.

Alcohol, tobacco and their associated risk factors have profound consequences on individuals and the Rwandan society at large," the report further writes.

As regards to the reporting on the consumption of alcohol, the report illustrated that nine out of ten adult Rwandans thought regular use of alcohol is somewhat-to-very harmful with only 6% reporting that it is not harmful.

"More than half of adult Rwandans reported that an increase in the price of alcohol would make them buy alcohol less often, and approximately 84% had seen or heard information on the dangers of alcohol with radio (36.9%) and television (27.3%)

being the most common sources of that information," the report further writes.

Alphonse Mbarushimana, the Executive Director, Rwanda NCD Alliance commenting on the report said, consumption of alcohol and Tobacco are still a challenge.

He cautioned that Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) claim lives, especially among those in their productive years, and advised everyone to utilize the available information regarding the deadly impact of NCDs and their costly treatment.

"It is better to prevent diseases than cure," he advised.

Figures from the previous survey has indicated the consumption of alcohol and tobacco were high.

Rwanda Biomedical survey released in 2022 indicated that alcohol consumption was frequent in men (54.9%) which is 1.5 times more than women at 33.4%.

On the flip side of the coin, Dr. Joseph Mucumbitsi, Head of Rwanda NCD Alliance believes the political will of countries is a crucial factor towards eradication of Non Communicable diseases.

He said, NCD are serious issues which cannot be solved solely by communities but with engagement of leadership.

"An inspired leader can give good examples to fight against NCDs," he suggested.

Furthermore, he emphasized the necessity of sponsorship for sustainable financing to eradicate NCDs.

Addressing obesity, he highlighted that being overweight is a primary contributor to diabetes, cancer, and heart diseases, underscoring the importance of campaigns promoting proper nutrition and healthy lifestyles.

He advises, people should do slim and fit programs which are helping overweight people to minimize the risks of the Non-Communicable Diseases.

However, he said, obesity is not a major challenge. So far, obesity stands at 4.2% countrywide and are majorly women.

Reflecting on the obesity trend in Rwandan, Mucumbitsi argued, some Rwandans

are still malnourished and described the trend as the ‘double burden of malnutrition.’

“We still have over malnutrition and under malnutrition,” he said.

The RBC’s 2022 population based national survey on the prevalence of NCDs risk factors in Rwanda indicated that alcohol consumption in the country increased from 41 percent in 2013 to 48 percent in 2022