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According to a study conducted by the Food and Nutrition Research Institute (FNRI), three out of 10 Filipino adults are overweight or obese. The prevalence of overweight and obesity also increased across age groups.

Obesity is a precursor to many non-communicable diseases such as diabetes, heart illness, stroke, and some cancers, and yet a risk factor that can be readily curbed by lifestyle changes.

The International Diabetes Federation said that obesity in a population is a sensitive indicator that there is something notably wrong in our urban policies. To address the detrimental effects of obesity, it is recommended to not only observe healthy lifestyle modifications, but also to take “greener measures.”

Advocacy groups call for policies that recognize the intricate and complicated interplay of health and climate change. This is because obesity has been reported to increase greenhouse gas emissions by 20 percent more, because of fuel use from public transportation, food production, and health care needs. For example, meat has been found to increase carbon emissions seven times as compared to eating vegetables. Active transport such as walking and cycling, on the other hand, reduces carbon emission and helps prevent obesity.

The UN Habitat estimated that cities around the world are accountable for 60 percent of the total greenhouse gas emissions. In the same FNRI survey, obesity is a high priority in eight highly

urbanized cities in Metro Manila: San Juan, Mandaluyong, Manila, Makati, Taguig, Las Piñas, Caloocan, and Quezon City. Among these urban cities, only Quezon City is a member of the global network of C40 cities, which proactively intervenes in lowering carbon emissions.

Some international initiatives on obesity and climate action include active transport policies, the creation of green spaces crucial for exercise, and reduction in the production and consumption of animal products (like Sweden and Brazil’s meat-free days). There are local and small breakthroughs underway, such as Quezon City’s sustainable food production and Manila’s transformation of its public areas into “greener” spaces.

However, city policies tackling both obesity and climate change are still lacking. Policies should not be designed in the individual silos of health or climate change, but for both, and should be responsive to everyone’s needs, most especially the vulnerable and poor populations who have the least access to healthier and greener alternatives.

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