

A better world, a healthier world, a more just world

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Dr. Apoorva Gomer, Sir Trevor Hassell and Grace Gatera speak during the Fireside Chat during the Opening Plenary. ©NCDA/Gilberto Lontro

It has been just over two years since the last Global NCD Alliance Forum, and today almost 400 delegates from 85 countries assembled in Sharjah, United Arab Emirates, for the third such event. The first Global Forum in 2015 focused on the then-forthcoming Sustainable Development Goals. The second, at the end of 2017, looked ahead to the High-level Meeting on NCDs at the UN General Assembly. This year, the theme is ‘Bridging the gap’: how to translate the global commitments into national and local action, where we all live and work and play.

There are three sub-themes to the Forum, each of which, over the three days, will be the subject of a plenary session followed by parallel workshops to cover key issues in more depth. You can follow the Global Forum on Twitter through the hashtag #NCDAF2020. Some sessions will be livestreamed on the NCDA’s Facebook page.

As in previous years, one of the delights of the Global NCDA Forum is that it is not populated solely by the ‘usual suspects’ – indeed, a show of hands suggested that this is the first time that a majority of the delegates have attended an NCDA Forum. It is a valuable opportunity to hear a diverse range of interests and is an excellent networking and learning event for us all.

“We have taken to heart the core principles of the SDGs: that we have to step out of our comfort zones, break down siloes, and create synergies with non-health actors” – Ms Katie Dain, NCD Alliance

The keys to advocacy: young people and people living with NCDs

A pre-Forum session this morning began with ‘ImPatient for change: the power of lived experiences in bridging the gap for NCDs’ – and any lingering jetlag was quickly dispelled by a series of highly knowledgeable and passionate presentations. The speakers shared moving personal experiences of NCDs and called for the inclusion of people living with NCDs throughout every aspect of NCD strategy and planning (*‘nothing for us without us’*), and this was brought

home even more forcefully when Ms Charity Muturi of the Kenya NCD Alliance asked us all to stand and say (with conviction) *'Nothing for patients without patients!'* Panellists expressed their feelings about the NCD Alliance's Our Views Our Voices training for advocates: *'It changed my life personally and professionally; among all the workshops I have attended, it was it was a game-changing experience'* (Mr Bruno Helman, NCD youth advocate from Brazil).

"Step up like you've never stepped up before in your life" – Ms Lea Kilenga, Our Views, Our Voices Global Advisory Committee, NCD Alliance Kenya

In a parallel session on engaging young people in NCD advocacy, delegates were asked to develop an 'elevator pitch': *'No matter how many pitches you've done you can always practise and get better!'* (Andrej Vujkovic) To be effective, a pitch must be appropriately timed (for example, during the run-up to elections), carefully targeted to its audience, with a very concise problem statement and a clear and memorable ask. This can also be backed up by evidence, which can be quantitative or qualitative: stories can make the case particularly powerfully.

Gap analysis

At the heart of the Global Forum is the opportunity to foster national and regional civil society collaboration, which today took the form of Civil Society Coordination discussions. Delegates were divided into regional groups to tailor their priorities and develop a plan of action across five broad NCD gaps. The gaps were identified on the basis of recent NCD Alliance consultations – Accountability, Leadership, Investment, Care and Community Engagement. The feedback was revealing both of commonalities between regions (calls for stronger leadership and accountability) and of the differences (for example, high-income countries' focus on NCDs as a donor priority).

Satellite sessions gave us food for thought with our lunch:; for example, *'Protecting Populations, Preserving futures: empowering the health workforce to tackle the greatest global health challenge of our time'* addressed issues including the use of artificial intelligence and digital tools in health care, the lessons learned from HIV/AIDS, and the health of the workforce themselves. *'Delivering and financing quality care for NCDs: leaving no-one behind'* included many powerful voices of people living with NCDs calling for a more cohesive and integrated approach to combating NCDs, with discussion on impact investment and the need to incorporate NCDs within universal health coverage packages.

'The global health mission is about making space and making use of our privilege to ensure that the unfairness, cruelty and inequality of the world is chipped away at. Female leadership is very good at making room for others and that is why we require it to fulfil global health missions' – Dr Mamka Anyona, health specialist, NCDs, Unicef

Opening ceremony

His Royal Highness Sheikh Dr Sultan Bin Muhammad Al Qasimi, Member of the Supreme Council and Ruler of Sharjah, UAE, officially opened the Global Forum in the afternoon. Her Highness Sheikhha Jawaher Bint Mohammed Al Qasimi, Wife of the Ruler of Sharjah (UAE), Founder and Royal Patron of Friends of Cancer Patients, and International Ambassador for Childhood Cancer for the Union for International Cancer Control, presented an award to Her Excellency Mrs Sawsan Jafar. Mrs Jafar is the chair of the Board of Directors of Friends of Cancer Patients, the charity that is the local partner of the Forum; she welcomed delegates to Sharjah on behalf of the charity. Both Katie Dain and Todd Harper of the NCD Alliance thanked their Highnesses for the support and patronage.

Opening plenary

The opening plenary set the stage for the rest of the Global Forum: *'Bridging the gaps, seizing the moment for NCD prevention and control'*. The keynote speaker, Dr Colin Tukuitonga, Former Director-General of the Secretariat of the Pacific Community, presented the scale of the NCD challenge in the Pacific Islands, and the frustration that, despite considerable political commitment, there has been only limited progress to date. The mismatch between resources and need is *'like using a canoe paddle to turn the Titanic – and it's very hard to persuade development partners that NCDs are worth investing in.'*

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Next up was a 'fireside chat' between Sir Trevor Hassell of the Healthy Caribbean Coalition and two of the youth delegates at the Forum, Dr Apoorva Gomber (co-founder, Diabetes India Youth in Action) and Ms Grace Gatera (Partners in Health Rwanda). They gave thought-provoking testimony about their experiences of living with NCDs and how this has turned them into NCD advocates. They called on delegates to take forward what we learn at the Forum, with the active inclusion of the ideas, knowledge and enthusiasm of young people.

"If you are trying to create a future in which young people will thrive, then include them and actually listen to them ... include them in any and every discussion; ask them and take into consideration what they say" – Ms Grace Gatera

The final panel session of the day included a contribution from Dr Githinji Gitahi, whose work with UHC2030 and Amref Health Africa, coupled with his family's own experience with NCDs, have left him well placed to comment on the importance of the inclusion of NCDs within universal health coverage. He called on the World Health Organization, represented by Dr Ren Minghui on the panel, to review its health-system building blocks [<https://www.who.int/workforcealliance/knowledge/toolkit/26/en/>] [1] as health building blocks, rather than health care building blocks, reframing them to include issues such as of supported communities and gender empowerment. Ms Zoleka Mandela noted that '*we all have stories that are worth sharing and that can impact change*' – so she shares her own moving story and her strong voice to be a voice of change for others who are not yet empowered to do so.

And, to finish the day, Sir Trevor Hassell closed with a reminder of what it is we are all striving for: "*Create a better world, a healthier world, a more just world.*"

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