

Landmark meeting in Ghana shows highest political commitment to move the dial on chronic diseases

Submitted by jlbajdan@gmail.com on 20 April, 2022 - 15:25

Language English



People living with NCDs in low- and middle-income countries can face additional challenges. ©Facing Forward 2022.

The Governments of Ghana and Norway and the World Health Organization (WHO) hosted an [International Strategic Dialogue](#) [1] last week to raise the priority of noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) within the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) agenda in Accra, Ghana.

The event brought governments together with national and international actors and partners and included interventions from four Heads of State and their representatives from Barbados, Ghana, Norway, Timor-Leste and Thailand, as well as six first ladies, from the Bahamas, Belize, Congo, Croatia, Ghana and Niger.

The burden of NCDs highlighted

“The global burden of NCDs highlights the many threats people face through the air they breathe, conditions they work in and the food they eat. 85% of premature mortality from NCDs occur in low-and-middle-income countries (LMICs), a heavy toll on the economies which also counts down the productive years of populations.”
Dr Tedros Ghebreyesus, WHO Director General

The Heads of State emphasised that NCDs remain the leading cause of death globally with an increasing burden in LMICs, and have huge implications for economies worldwide. The President of Ghana’s representative called out these “silent killers” and also highlighted the strong link between [NCDs and COVID-19](#) [2]. Speakers highlighted [NCDs outside the “5x5 approach”](#) [3], including sickle cell and oral health, and brought out the link between NCDs and climate change. They also emphasised that many people living with NCDs live with multiple conditions, and that countries in Africa and Asia are increasingly faced with a double burden of infectious diseases and NCDs. This double burden drives inequality, increases pressure on health systems and increases the demand for scarce resources. The

WHO Regional Director for Africa, Dr Matshidiso Moeti, warned: “NCDs present a great threat to the continent’s social and economic development”. Barbados’s Prime Minister, The Honourable Mia Mottley pointed out that “the pandemic has affected the social determinants of health leading to increased job loss and reduced financial capacity which then leads to an increased burden of NCDs.” Other interventions also highlighted the unequal burden of NCDs, with disparities within and among countries, and their heavy economic burden on people living with NCDs and their families.

The NCD agenda made everyone’s business

The Dialogue made it clear that NCDs must remain on everyone’s agenda for action – young, old, male, and female regardless of geographical, ethnic, economic and religious differences. The strong voices of five people living with NCDs who addressed participants called for urgent and sustained action. The meaningful engagement of people living with NCDs during the event highlighted the importance of leveraging first-hand experience from communities as seen through initiatives such as [Our View, Our Voices](#) [4] and the [Global Charter for meaningful involvement of people living with NCDs](#) [5].

NCD Alliance’s President-Elect, Dr Monika Arora, shared results from the newly published [Lancet report from the NCD Countdown 2030](#) [6] encouraging Heads of State that “reaching the SDG target 3.4 on reducing premature deaths from NCDs by one-third by 2030 is possible.” WHO’s Regional Director for the Western Pacific, Dr Takeshi Kasai reminded us all that “after many years of experience and research, we know what needs to be done. We need to tailor the what and the who to communities. Healthy and enabling environments require many stakeholders beyond health.”

Why the Dialogue matters: The political will and action to move the dial on NCDs

“Only 14 countries are on track to meet SDG 3.4. Today, we are launching the international NCD compact – a consolidated global effort to prevent people from dying. NCDs are a large world-scale problem but I am convinced this goal is achievable. We have 8 more years to act.” Jonas Gahr Støre, Prime Minister of Norway.

The ISD [had two outcomes](#) [7]. The first is a new Global Compact on NCDs (2022 – 2030), and the second is the launch of a new Heads of State and Government Group.

The expectation of the Global Compact on NCDs is to provide actionable steps to achieve the SDGs and the related NCD goals. It will aim to deliver on five key areas of commitment, including:

- Saving 50 million people from dying prematurely of NCDs through cost-effective measures to prevent and control NCDs by 2030;
- Protecting 1.7 billion people living with NCDs in humanitarian settings through increased access to medicines and care;
- Integrating NCDs within primary health care and universal health coverage;
- Comprehensive NCD surveillance and monitoring; and
- Meaningfully engaging 1.7 billion people living with NCDs and mental health conditions in policy-making and

programming.

The Heads of State and Government Group will meet annually during the UN High General Assemblies happening each September from 2022 to 2025, garnering high-level commitment to the cause. A network of first ladies to accelerate progress on NCDs and SDGs was also promised.

Reducing the burden of NCDs will require strong political will and substantial health systems reform. The outcomes of the ISD could be pivotal to supporting the integration of NCDs within primary health care, universal health coverage and pandemic recovery. Its promised commitment and action are strategic, important, and timely to move the NCD agenda forward; providing an opportunity to build on existing frameworks, fulfil commitments and advance NCD action.

Championed by Heads of State, the ISD and its outcomes promise a new pathway to strengthened action on NCDs. In the words of Dr Tedros Ghebreyesus, "Together, we can change the paradigm so that people around the world can live healthier lives."

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[2] <https://ncdalliance.org/ncd-covid-19-recovery-agenda-report>

[3] https://ncdalliance.org/sites/default/files/resource_files/The%20Need%20for%20a%20Person-Centred%2C%20Inclusive%20NCD_17%20NOV.pdf

[4] <http://ourviewsourvoices.org/>

[5] <https://www.ourviewsourvoices.org/global-charter>

[6] [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(21\)02347-3/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(21)02347-3/fulltext)

[7] <https://www.who.int/news/item/12-04-2022-who--ghana-and-norway-agree-to-accelerate-actions-to-save-lives-in-first-international-strategic-dialogue-on-noncommunicable-diseases-and-the-sustainable-development-goals>

[8] <http://www.actonnncds.org/>

[9] <https://ncdalliance.org/taxonomy/term/87>