

**Statement by the NCD Alliance and Africa NCDs Network (ANN) on
Agenda Item 16.13 – Progress report on implementing the regional strategy for community
engagement, 2023–2030 in the WHO African Region**

The NCD Alliance and Africa NCDs Network applaud WHO and Member States for committing to institutionalising social participation and community engagement, and welcome progress on the regional strategy.

People living with NCDs have the right to participate in decisions affecting our health. Lived experience is expertise—crucial for identifying barriers and solutions. Policies and programmes that are co-developed with people with lived experience are more likely to be effective and sustainable. Social participation can build trust and local ownership, increase accountability and promote people-centred health systems.

Yet the members of our network report that engagement remains too often reactive rather than embedded in health governance. The ANN is collaborating with Africa CDC, and hopes to see significant involvement from WHO AFRO to accelerate the People Power Agenda and align with WHO’s framework on meaningful engagement of people with NCDs, mental health, and neurological conditions.

We express concern that while 36 countries have integrated community engagement into national guidelines, few have co-developed operating procedures or guiding principles. Of 37 countries that mapped community assets, most activities focused narrowly on emergency preparedness. We strongly believe the focus should be expanded.

We recommend that Member States

- Expand their mapping of assets and structures to communities and civil society active on NCDs. NCD civil society, through the Africa NCDs Network and national alliances across the region, are spearheading social participation efforts and stand ready to work with WHO and governments on advancing community engagement to advance the NCD response.
- Involve NCD civil society, people living with NCDs and communities in the development of SOPs and guiding principles for social participation within national health sector guidelines and plans. Co-development of participatory spaces and approaches are critical to achieve meaningful participation.
- Embed community engagement in PHC, UHC, and NCD policies, with dedicated budgets and trained workforce.
- Strengthen cross-border and regional knowledge exchange on effective engagement and participatory models.

True health system resilience depends on people - not just policies. Health for all in Africa will only be possible when communities are equal partners in shaping the path forward.