IDF Submission – Post-2015 Global Thematic Consultation on Environmental Sustainability

A. Rationale for Health and the Environment

The International Diabetes Federation (IDF), an umbrella organisation of over 220 national Member Associations in over 170 countries – is the unique global voice of the diabetes community.

The global diabetes epidemic is one of the most urgent health and development challenges in the 21st century. This lifelong non-communicable disease (NCD) is largely preventable but remains responsible for over 4 million deaths annually and many more life-threatening complications. Over 370 million people have the disease worldwide, and IDF estimates that by 2030 the global figure will rise to over half a billion – or one in ten adults. The greatest burden is increasingly falling on low and middle income countries (LMICs), where four out of five people with diabetes live.¹

Human health is a fundamental precondition, indicator and outcome of all three dimensions of sustainable development – economic, environmental and social. The Rio Declaration adopted in 1992 stated that “human beings are at the centre of concerns for sustainable development – they are entitled to a healthy and productive life in harmony with nature.”² At the United Nations (UN) Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) in June 2012, UN Member States reaffirmed that sustainable development will only be achieved in the absence of a high prevalence of communicable and non-communicable diseases and when populations reach a state of physical, mental and social well-being.³

There is an urgent need to advance this recognition and promote the integration of health throughout all dimensions of development in the post-2015 agenda, including in the UN Global Thematic Consultation on Environmental Sustainability. Health and the environment are inextricably linked. Environmental degradation – including climate change, air pollution and food insecurity – is one of the leading threats to human health in the 21st Century.⁴ One-quarter of the global disease burden is caused by environmental factors.⁵ Similarly, continuing health inequities, such as the rising burden of diabetes and NCDs and their impact in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), undermines the three pillars of sustainable development.⁶ Further, stressing the connections between health and environment – and the ‘co-benefit’ policies that can protect both – increases public support for environmental sustainability.

IDF and the NCD Alliance aim to ensure the post-2015 development agenda reflects the centrality of health to all dimensions of development – social, economic and environmental. In this proposal, IDF presents the connections between diabetes and climate change in order to strengthen the place of health within environmental sustainability, and advance a future development agenda that is people-centred, inclusive and sustainable. IDF welcomes the opportunity to contribute to this consultation on Environmental Sustainability in the Post-2015 Agenda and proposes health as a priority theme. IDF’s key messages are:

• The current development agenda fails to tackle interconnected global challenges and threats – including health and the environment, and diabetes and climate change, which are urgent 21st Century development issues;

• The shared connections between diabetes and climate change, in terms of both risks and solutions, highlights the need for increased policy coherence and the “co-benefit” approach to health and the environment;

• These connections mandate the integration of health throughout different dimensions of development, and strengthen the need for a holistic post-2015 development framework which integrates people-centered, inclusive and sustainable.
B. Existing Findings

Current Development Agenda

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) achieved major progress on tackling specific dimensions of extreme poverty, including child mortality and communicable diseases. However, progress on the MDGs has not been consistent, inequality has grown and global trends in demography, epidemiology, migration, urbanisation, consumption and production are now creating new challenges that are undermining social, economic and environmental development. This includes issues such as climate change and the growing burden of diabetes and the related Non-communicable Diseases (diabetes, cancer, cardiovascular and chronic respiratory diseases), which are the world’s leading cause of death.

Diabetes is an urgent health and development challenge in the 21st century. IDF estimates that 371 million people are living with diabetes, rising to 552 million – or one in ten adults – by 2030.\textsuperscript{vii} Health systems in LMCs remain oriented to MDG priorities, vertical diseases programmes and delivering acute care and are often completely unable to provide essential diagnosis and treatment for diabetes. At the UN High Level Summit on NCDs in September 2011, UN Member States affirmed diabetes and the related NCDs are leading threats to social and economic development in the 21st Century.\textsuperscript{viii}

Diabetes and Climate Change

IDF has explored the synergies of diabetes with multiple dimensions of development, including environmental sustainability. IDF published a report on Diabetes and Climate Change in May 2012, which establishes that these two issues are not only common health and development threats for all nations, but they are fundamentally connected – both directly and indirectly.\textsuperscript{ix} Directly, the growing burden of diabetes and NCDs threatens the environment, as these diseases place large demands on health systems and increase their large carbon footprint. Equally, climate change has major implications for the social and environmental determinants of health, worsens health outcomes and increases diabetes risk, particularly through extreme climactic events and rising food insecurity.

Indirectly, diabetes shares common vectors with climate change – urbanisation, demographic change and the global food system – that increase carbon emissions, environmental degradation and exposure to diabetes risk factors such as physical inactivity and unhealthy diets. For example, 7 out of 10 people are expected to live in urban areas by 2050, severely increasing resource consumption, environmental degradation and type 2 diabetes risks, especially in LMCs. The global food system – which is failing to protect the environment and to meet health and nutritional needs – is deeply dysfunctional in its present form. For example, as climate extremes disrupt traditional food supplies, vulnerable populations such as indigenous communities are at risk from both facets of malnutrition (undernutrition and overnutrition from imported and processed foods) and experience a devastating diabetes burden.\textsuperscript{x}

IDF’s report establishes that “co-benefit” solutions – such as ‘active travel’ which promotes walking and cycling to cut carbon emissions and increase physical activity, or ‘sustainable diets’ which deliver adequate diets while protecting the environment and livelihoods – are crucial strategies to promote sustainable development, health and wellbeing. In addition, the co-benefit approach has been shown to increase support for environmental issues by making them more understandable and personally relevant to the public.

Post-2015 Development

The scale, impact and interconnections of diabetes and climate change are indicative of a wider sustainability crisis in the way we view and approach development. Both are common challenges that all countries face in adapting to globalisation and need a truly universal development agenda, with shared
responsibilities for all countries, to address. The siloes of the MDG era must be replaced by a post-2015 framework that recognises the synergies between development issues and increases policy coherence, interdependence and shared solutions to ensure a healthy future for both people and planet.

Climate change or diabetes, neglected in the MDG framework, have now been internationally recognised as threatening economic development and undermining poverty reduction. *The Future We Want* Outcomes Document adopted at Rio+20 affirmed that the scale and gravity of climate change and NCDs undermine the ability of all countries to achieve sustainable development. Both climate change and NCDs are identified as future priorities within the UN Task Team (UNTT) Report to the Secretary General on post-2015, “Realizing the Future We Want for All.”

The UNTT Report places NCDs under an overarching health goal (such as reduced morbidity and mortality) in the “inclusive social development” dimension of the post-2015 framework. In addition to this, IDF and the NCD Alliance call for health and NCDs to be integrated across all dimensions. As recognised at Rio+20, diabetes and NCDs are multisectoral issues, therefore an understanding of how NCDs intersect with poverty reduction and economic development, social development, and environmental sustainability needs to be evident in the post-2015 development framework. This will require diabetes, NCDs and health to be considered in the formulation of all goals, and health indicators to be included across economic, social and environmental dimensions.

The paradigm shift towards sustainable development is a significant opportunity to change the current course of current development, which remains inequitable and environmentally destructive. IDF stresses that sustainability must be at the core of the post-2015 framework – along with other fundamental values of human rights and equality – rather than exist as a separate agenda. We call for the full integration of the post-2015 and the ‘Sustainable Development Goals’ (SDG) processes, to establish one global development framework for post-2015. The challenge is to ensure this framework is people-centred, inclusive and sustainable.

C. Proposed Questions

- **Health and Environment** – How can we advance understanding of the known connections between health and the environment to ensure policy coherence in the post-2015 agenda?
- **Climate Change** – How will the post-2015 agenda include low carbon development pathways that are equitable and health promoting?
- **The Right to Food** – How will food and nutrition security (which includes universal to an adequate and nutritious diet) for all be achieved sustainably in the post-2015 agenda? How can the global food system, agricultural and rural development sectors be reformed in an economically, socially and environmentally sustainable way?
- **Transport** – How will the post-2015 agenda promote transport that enhances sustainable development, social equity and health, particularly in LMCS?
- **Sustainable Cities** – How will the post-2015 agenda promote an integrated approach to planning and building sustainable cities to ensure a healthy living environment for all?

Supporting Documents:
- IDF Diabetes and Climate Change Report
- NCD Alliance Sustainable Development Briefing Paper
- NCD Alliance Think Piece on Positioning NCDs in the Post-2015 Development Framework