

**Committee/Council:** *Special Conference on Health Hazards*

**Issue:** *Measures to combat non-communicable diseases*

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## **Introduction**

Non-communicable diseases have troubled nations for years. They are the primary cause of death globally at 63% of all deaths (or 35 million people per annum) with this figure reaching 80% in LDCs. NCDs are closely related to environmental, genetic and also lifestyle factors. The World Health Organisation (WHO) estimates the greatest increase in NCDs to be in the African region (27%) and in the Eastern Mediterranean region (25%), while the absolute death numbers will peak in the Western Pacific and Southeast Asia. NCDs are also known to lead to a weak economy, as seen below, and are indirect results of globalisation. Since they hinder economic development prospects, stem from and at the same time reinforce globalisation but also are, as mentioned before, the leading cause of death globally and a major obstacle in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals, they constitute an issue that must be addressed promptly and efficiently.

## **Definition of Key-Terms**

non-communicable disease(NCD): a medical condition or illness which is not contagious and not caused by an infection(although some forms of cancer have been attributed to infections).It can be either a long-term disease or a short-term disease.They include injuries, cardiovascular diseases, cancers, respiratory diseases, digestive diseases and also neuropsychiatric disorders.

cardiovascular disease(CVD): Cardiovascular disease (CVD) is the name for the group of disorders of heart and blood vessels, and include:hypertension (high blood pressure) , coronary heart disease (heart attack), cerebrovascular disease (stroke), peripheral vascular disease, heart failure, rheumatic heart disease, congenital heart disease, cardiomyopathies.

cancer: Cancer is a generic term for a large group of diseases that can affect any part of the body. Other terms used are malignant tumours and neoplasms. One defining feature of cancer is the rapid creation of abnormal cells that grow beyond their usual boundaries, and which can then invade adjoining parts of the body and spread to other organs. This process is referred to as metastasis. Metastases are the major cause of death from cancer.

respiratory diseases: Chronic respiratory diseases are chronic diseases of the airways and other structures of the lung. Some of the most common are: asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), respiratory allergies, occupational lung diseases and pulmonary hypertension.

diabetes mellitus: Diabetes is a chronic disease, which occurs when the pancreas does not produce enough insulin, or when the body cannot effectively use the insulin it produces. This leads to an increased concentration of glucose in the blood (hyperglycaemia).

- Type 1 diabetes (previously known as insulin-dependent or childhood-onset diabetes) is characterized by a lack of insulin production.
- Type 2 diabetes (formerly called non-insulin-dependent or adult-onset diabetes) is caused by the body's ineffective use of insulin. It often results from excess body weight and physical inactivity.

Gestational diabetes is hyperglycaemia that is first recognized during pregnancy.

## Major Countries and Organizations Involved

- WHO:

The World Health Organization is the specialized agency of the United Nations (UN) that acts as coordinating authority on international public health issues, including NCDs. In May 2008, the 193 Member States of the WHO approved a six-year plan to address non-communicable diseases, especially the rapidly increasing burden in low- and middle-income countries. The plan calls for raising the priority given to NCDs in international development work. During the 64th session of the United Nations General Assembly in 2010, a resolution was passed to call for a high-level meeting of the General Assembly on the prevention and treatment NCDs with the participation of heads of state and government. The resolution also encouraged UN Member States to address the issue of non-communicable diseases at the 2010 Review Summit for the Millennium Development Goals. In September 2011, the UN is hosting its first General Assembly Special Summit on the issue of NCDs. Noting that NCDs are the cause of some 35 million deaths each year, the international community is being increasingly called to take important measures for the prevention and control of non-communicable diseases, and mitigate their impacts on the world population. Especially on women, who are usually the primary caregivers.

- NCD Alliance:

The NCD Alliance was formed by four international NGOs committed to the main non-communicable diseases (diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, cancer and chronic respiratory diseases). Along with other major international NGO partners, the NCD Alliance unites a network of over 2,000 civil society organizations in more than 170 countries. The mission of the NCD Alliance is to combat the NCD epidemic by establishing health as the top priority of states.

- NCDnet:

An initiative started by the World Health Organisation. The creation of the Global Noncommunicable Disease Network (NCDnet) is in direct support of the Objective 5 of the NCD Action Plan that specifically calls upon Member States, WHO, and international partners and other stakeholders to promote partnerships for the prevention and control of noncommunicable diseases. The mission of NCDnet is to help implement the Noncommunicable Disease Action Plan by catalysing an intersectoral, multi-level coordinated

response with a particular focus on low- and middle-income countries and vulnerable populations.

- WHO FCTC:

The WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO FCTC) is the first international treaty negotiated under the auspices of WHO. It was adopted by the World Health Assembly on 21 May 2003 and entered into force on 27 February 2005. It has since become one of the most rapidly and widely embraced treaties in United Nations history.

The WHO FCTC was developed in response to the globalization of the tobacco epidemic and is an evidence-based treaty that reaffirms the right of all people to the highest standard of health. The Convention represents a milestone for the promotion of public health and provides new legal dimensions for international health cooperation.

Parties to the FCTC: 175 states

Signatories: 168 states

- World Heart Federation

The World Heart Federation is dedicated to leading the global fight against heart disease and stroke with a focus on low- and middle-income countries via a united community of more than 200 member organizations. With its members, the World Heart Federation works to build global commitment to addressing cardiovascular health at the policy level, generates and exchanges ideas, shares best practice, advances scientific knowledge and promotes knowledge transfer to tackle cardiovascular disease – the world's number one killer. It is a growing membership organization that brings together the strength of medical societies and heart foundations from more than 100 countries. Through our collective efforts we can help people all over the world to lead longer and better heart-healthy lives. For more information, please visit [www.worldheart.org](http://www.worldheart.org).

- International Diabetes Federation

The International Diabetes Federation (IDF) is an umbrella organization of over 200 member associations in more than 160 countries, representing over 285 million people with diabetes, their families, and their healthcare providers. The mission of IDF is to promote diabetes care, prevention and a cure worldwide. For more information, please visit [www.idf.org](http://www.idf.org).

- About the International Union Against Cancer

The International Union Against Cancer (UICC) unites 360 member organizations in over 100 countries in the global fight against cancer. It is the leading international NGO dedicated exclusively to the global control of cancer. The UICC is aiming to create a dynamic global community of connected cancer control organizations, professionals and volunteers working together to eliminate cancer as a major life-threatening disease for future generations. For more information, please visit [www.uicc.org](http://www.uicc.org).

- International Union Against Tuberculosis and Lung Disease (The Union)

The mission of the International Union Against Tuberculosis and Lung Disease (The Union) is to bring innovation, expertise, solutions and support to address health challenges in low- and middle-income populations. Founded in 1920, The Union today is both a non-profit institution with five scientific departments and 14 offices worldwide and a federation of close to 3,000 organisations and individuals who are committed to the same goals. Its scientific departments

focus on tuberculosis, HIV, lung health and non-communicable diseases, tobacco control and research; and each engages in research, provides technical assistance and offers training and other capacity-building activities leading to health solutions for the poor. To learn more about The Union, please visit [www.theunion.org](http://www.theunion.org).

## Background Information

### Causes of NCDs:

Non-communicable diseases are primarily linked to lifestyle and environment factors, which include unhealthy food consumption, lack of exercise, smoking but also include hereditary factors and air pollution, etc. However, sometimes a temporary infection could cause some forms of cancer.

### Prevention of NCDs

No matter what the causing factors might be, almost all NCDs are monitorable to some extent by the affected people. A few alterations to the daily lifestyle of a person suffering from an NCD can significantly increase their life duration. However, each state should also take further action, not only by the provision of health care but also by the adoption of measures which will regulate unhealthy habits that pose a threat to other individuals. Smoking prohibition laws constitute an example of such measures.

### NCDs and the economy

NCDs are well known for posing a threat not only to human health, but also to the global economy and to development prospects. As abovementioned, they account for 63% of all deaths, with that percentage reaching 80 per cent in developing countries. Half of those who succumb to these diseases are in their productive years, so obviously economic competitiveness prospects are reduced. Over the next 20 years, NCDs will cost more than US\$ 30 trillion, representing 48% of global GDP in 2010, and therefore breeding extreme poverty. Mental health conditions alone will account for the loss of an additional US\$ 16.1 trillion over this time period, with a dramatic impact on productivity and quality of life. However, evidence shows how millions of deaths can be averted and economic losses can be reduced by billions of dollars if added focus is put on prevention. A recent WHO report points out that population-based measures for minimising tobacco and harmful alcohol use, as well as unhealthy diet and physical inactivity, are estimated to cost merely US\$ 2 billion per year for all low- and middle-income countries, which in fact translates to less than US\$ 0.40 per person.

### NCDs and globalisation

1. Tobacco: Tobacco companies have been searching for effective ways to maximise their profits, and globalisation provided them with the perfect opportunity. They promoted cigarettes to developing countries, therefore creating consumer demand, by neglecting to cite the unwanted side-effects of smoking. As a result, along with profits in the tobacco industry, there was a sharp rise in cancer and respiratory diseases in LDCs.
2. Alcohol: Alcohol firms are nearly as globalised as the tobacco ones, and seem to follow the same immoral practices. While alcohol actually reduces the risk of cardiovascular

diseases, that applies to the consumption of very small amounts of it. If an overdose occurs, the opposite effect is caused.

3. Nutrition transition: In most countries, the shift from a vegetable and fruit diet to an animal fat-centered one has (unfortunately) been completed. Yet on LDCs, this process has not even begun to this day. And animal fat can indeed cause CVDs and increase obesity rates, as it is well known. So, this is actually limiting NCD development in these areas.

### Timeline of Events

Date	Description of event
<u>2000:</u>	<u>Global Strategy for the Prevention and Control of Noncommunicable Diseases</u>
<u>2003:</u>	<u>WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control</u>
<u>2004:</u>	<u>Global Strategy on Diet, Physical Activity and Health</u>
<u>2007:</u>	<u>Resolution WHA60/15 on Prevention and control of noncommunicable diseases: implementation of the global strategy</u>
<u>2008:</u>	<u>Resolution WHA61/4 on Strategies to reduce the harmful use of alcohol</u>
<u>2008:</u>	<u>WHO Report on the Global Tobacco Epidemic, 2008 - The MPOWER Package</u>
<u>2008-2013:</u>	<u>Medium-term Strategic Plan</u> <u>Action Plan for the Global Strategy for the Prevention and Control of Noncommunicable Diseases:</u>
<u>2011:</u>	<u>UN Summit on NCDs</u>

### Treaty/Resolution

Resolution WHA60/15 on Prevention and control of noncommunicable diseases: implementation of the global strategy

Resolution WHA61/4 on Strategies to reduce the harmful use of alcohol

WHO Report on the Global Tobacco Epidemic, 2008 - The MPOWER Package

The WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO FCTC) and its guidelines provide the foundation for countries to implement and manage tobacco control. To help make this a reality, WHO introduced the MPOWER measures. These measures are intended to assist in the country-level implementation of effective interventions to reduce the demand for tobacco, contained in the WHO FCTC.

### Action Plan for the Global Strategy for the Prevention and Control of Noncommunicable Diseases:

This plan has laid out six objectives, as reported by WHO:

1) To raise the priority accorded to non-communicable disease in development work at global and national levels, and to integrate prevention and control of such diseases into policies across all government departments.

2) To establish and strengthen national policies and plans for the prevention and control of non-communicable diseases.

3) To promote interventions to reduce the main shared modifiable risk factors for non-communicable diseases : tobacco use, unhealthy diets, physical inactivity and harmful use of alcohol.

4) To promote research for the prevention and control of non-communicable diseases.

5) To promote partnerships for the prevention and control of non-communicable diseases.

6) To monitor non-communicable diseases and their determinants and evaluate progress at the national, regional and global levels

### **Previous Attempts to solve the Issue**

No significant efforts have occurred by doctors and medical scientists in order to solve this issue, due to their reluctance to change their primary focus from communicable diseases to NCDs. However, the UN and various Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) have been particularly active. The UN protocols and NGOs' actions have been listed above.

### **Possible Solutions**

The approach that had been followed in the past, targeting individuals, came to no avail. So, it becomes apparent that future actions must focus on groups of individuals or, ideally, on society as a whole, because collectivist action is what can provide an efficient solution. Governments and NGOs should create schemes motivating citizens to lead a healthier lifestyle and limit smoking and other actions that do not only threaten the user's but also general public health by formulating such laws.

However, what would actually be effective is combining the aforementioned solution with the practice of 'divide and conquer'. In other words, to deal with each NCD group separately,

except if they correlate, by eliminating them one by one. Although this will be time-consuming, it probably will be fruitful over time.

Table: Major NCDs and proposed solutions

Non-communicable diseases	Proposed solutions
CVD	limit smoking, alcohol intake
respiratory diseases	reduce harmful emissions
cancer	ban the use of formaldehyde, acrylamide and other substances attributed to cancer
neuropsychological disorders	improve living and working conditions in most affected areas

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