

## **UN Civil Society Hearing on NCDs, 19 June**

Professor Gerald Yonga, Aga Khan University

Roundtable 1: Enhancing International Cooperation for NCDs; *Mobilizing domestic, bilateral, regional, and multi-lateral resources, and building capacities for sustainable human development.*

Good morning. My name is Professor Gerald Yonga. I am The National Chair, NCD Alliance, Kenya. I wish to thank the President of the General Assembly for inviting me to speak today at this important Civil Society Hearing on NCDs.

I would like to share with you my experiences of tackling NCDs in Kenya, East Africa, and broadly sub-Saharan Africa. Ladies and gentlemen, please allow me to be blunt. The challenge is immense. We are witnessing a spiraling burden of NCDs, which now overshadows that of communicable diseases. Our health systems are ill-equipped and overwhelmed; our national economies are buckling under the pressure; and our people, often in the prime of their life, are paying with their lives for inaction.

There can be no doubt. These diseases constitute a health and development emergency of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. They are undermining sustainable human development in my region; threaten achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) and even the post MDG era.

But while there are many challenges, there are also opportunities and examples of good progress. Today, I would like to share with you one example. This example highlights some important messages for today's proceedings – it is a case study that underscores the crucial role of civil society, the importance of cooperation within a region and twinning across regions, and above all, the imperative for action.

Over the last few years in East Africa, we have seen the emergence of national NCD alliances and we can proudly say that we now have national NCD alliances in Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Zanzibar, and alliances are currently being set up in Rwanda and Burundi. These alliances unite organisations for a common cause, and are proving to be strong platforms for advocacy, awareness and synergistic multisectoral mobilisation for NCD action across the countries in the Eastern Africa region which share similar baseline policy and action status and also challenges.

What is particularly unique also, is that some of these NCD Alliance have been set up by twinning with the Danish NCD Alliance with support from the DANIDA Civil Society Fund. This is the only example of twinning between alliances from high-income countries and low-income countries; and also a unique example of a bilateral development agency funding civil society efforts on NCDs.

As an example of enhancing international cooperation for NCDs, one year ago, we set out to work on a joint regional initiative (The East Africa NCD Alliance Initiative). This was done with technical support from key global partners, namely the Danish NCD Alliance, the Global NCD Alliance, the Framework Convention Alliance, and three universities – Aarhus University, Denmark, Yale University, USA and USCLA, USA.

Ladies and gentlemen, the importance of North-South, South-South and triangular cooperation is widely recognised in global health and development discourse, and was enshrined in the 2011 UN Political Declaration on NCDs. Our East Africa NCD Alliance Initiative puts these words into practice for NCDs. It aims to promote closer technical cooperation between the East African NCD alliances through learning, training and sharing of experiences, as well as strengthening the civil society organisations capacity for advocacy and collaborative networks regionally and globally.

Together, we are now working to influence national governments in East Africa to increase political priority and resources allocation for NCDs in the post-2015 development agenda. These countries are currently in the process of socio-economic integration to form The East African Community and already have an East African Parliament with a parliamentary committee on Health.

We conducted a benchmarking baseline survey on the NCD policy and action status in the East African countries and presented the results in a three day multi-sectoral NCD meeting in Entebbe, Uganda 13-15<sup>th</sup> June 2014. The culmination of the baseline NCD policy and action status results presentation and discussion was creation of “The East African Civil Society NCD Charter. The charter was endorsed by all major stake-holders present at this meeting. The charter is our call to action for NCDs to governments and the international community.

I would like to share with you three priorities from our Charter and urge Member States to consider these in your negotiations on the UN Review Outcome Document:

**1. Prioritise NCDs in national and global development plans and agendas.**

- In Africa, we are in no doubt of the impact of NCDs on human development. We urge our governments in East Africa to prioritise NCDs in national development plans and instruments, and develop a multi-sectoral and whole government approach to health, in particular NCDs as critical to sustainable human development in the post 2015 development era.
- We also request donor governments and agencies to align development aid and assistance with country and regional priorities and fulfil the promises made in the Paris and Accra declarations on aid effectiveness.

**2. Strengthen civil society capacity building efforts, particularly in low- and middle-income countries.**

- The 2011 NCD UN Political Declaration promotes the importance of civil society in the NCD response. Yet, over the last three years, there has been insufficient attention to ensuring strong and thriving civil society in all countries.
- I therefore request for the establishment of a Civil Society Fund for NCDs, specifically targeted at strengthening organisations and alliances in LMICs to play their role effectively in awareness creation, advocacy, multi-sectoral mobilization to action and holding their governments to account on the commitments made.

**3. Close the global resource gap on NCDs, and walk the talk on north-south, south-south, and triangular cooperation.**

- It is simply unacceptable that NCDs remain under-funded and under-prioritized by governments and the international community. The evidence speaks clearly on the current and projected impact of NCDs on human development and future.
- International trade activities especially on tobacco, alcohol, healthy foods and access to essential medicines and diagnostics need to be in line with 2011 UN Political Declaration on NCDs and attainment of the target goals.
- Our people, economies, and the planet in general will pay the price if we do not invest now. Investment in NCDs makes great sense for human development.

Thank you, Ladies and Gentlemen.