COMMENTS ON THE DRAFT REPORT OF THE WHO INDEPENDENT HIGH-LEVEL COMMISSION ON NCDs

The draft report of the WHO independent high-level commission on NCDs is well written and the recommendations clearly identify actions needed to address the growing burden of NCDs. From the African perspective, we have the following comments for your consideration.

1. The recommendations are mainly targeted at high level policy actions, and do not comprehensively address actions required at individual and community level. National authorities should put more efforts in addressing the issues of life styles and rapid changes in nutritional habits, particular with respect to the mushrooming and marketing of fast foods and soft drinks chains rich in fats, sodium and sugars.

2. Health systems challenges and institutional weaknesses remain major bottlenecks to the appropriate management and control of NCDs. Skilled and well facilitated workforce is a critical factor in ensuring strong health systems. There is also need to change the mind-set of the health workforce from working in silos, to transform them to start working across sectors in a more integrated and intersectoral manner.

3. The report is silent on the issue of ageing. This is an emerging issue in Africa and indeed in the rest of the world. There is need for stronger advocacy on ageing. The nursing workforce is critical in this endeavour, and efforts must be made to train more nurses for this purpose.

4. Tobacco is a major cash crop in some countries. Unless alternatives to generate income for those countries are found, it will be difficult to implement tobacco control in those countries. We need to transform agriculture to less harmful commercial products like wood, cassava, rice, etc.

5. For cancers, emphasis should be placed on regular screening, early detection and treatment.

6. Current recommendations skewed towards actions required in the public sector. We need a more responsible private sector and civil society, particularly in terms of marketing harmful products to children and vulnerable groups.

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