

## SIDS HIGH-LEVEL TECHNICAL MEETING ON NCDs AND MENTAL HEALTH

Side event 3: A coherent UN-system response to support Small Island Developing States scale up action on NCDs and mental health.

Summary report.

Barbados, 17 January 2023



## 1. Summary of key points

### *NCDs and mental health challenges in SIDS*

- The NCD crisis in SIDS originates from a multitude of factors, such as urbanization, declining domestic food production, importation of unhealthy food products, poor food habits, and lack of infrastructure for physical activity. Mental health conditions and lack of access to mental health services is also a major issue in SIDS.
- Loss of heritage and identity in SIDS has contributed to NCDs. Urbanization has resulted in a move away from traditional (often healthier) diets and lifestyles.
- The global trading system is also a major challenge in the NCD response, with high import and export prices in SIDS and the inability of governments (often due to WTO obligations), to ban/restrict the importation of unhealthy food products and beverages.
- The links among climate change, NCDs and mental health are significant in SIDS (food security, nutrition etc).
- Given the above, it is inaccurate and unhelpful to 'blame' individuals in relation to behavioural risks. Behaviours are largely determined by the environment in which people live (e.g. costs, access, marketing and culture).

### *Tackling NCDs and mental ill-health*

- Mental health is not receiving enough attention. It must be seen as an integral aspect of addressing NCDs, with greater clarity on how disorders are defined and addressed across governments and UN agencies.
- Lack of sufficient and sustained human and financial resources impedes an effective and resilient response to NCDs and mental ill-health conditions. UN agencies must support SIDS in identifying and accessing necessary resources, at international and domestic levels.
- Nuanced approaches are crucial considering the heterogeneity of conditions comprising NCDs as well as distinct considerations across the life-course. Stronger action from UN agencies is needed to support children in particular.
- Coordinated advocacy and action requires increased data (e.g., across demographic groups), greater coherence among data sources, and translation of data into actionable information.
- Greater focus on vulnerabilities can strengthen NCD and mental health responses. A multidimensional vulnerability index (MVI) for SIDS could support this.
- Political momentum and effective policy change can be compromised when government leadership turns over. The UN system needs to support countries on sustaining effective responses.
- Attention to the economic impacts of NCDs and mental health disorders remains vital to influence policy makers.
- NCD action must be multisectoral, multi-agency and multi-layered. The UN system must support SIDS to strengthen health systems, health literacy programmes, policies to reduce disinformation, a sustainable workforce, food security, and health and national adaptation plans for climate-related events.
- Countries need to receive technical assistance from agencies and staff with contextual awareness and experience, in a way that builds local capacity with transfer of skills.

*Inclusion of NCDs and mental health in UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks (UNSDCFs) among SIDS*

- Overall, the prevention and control of NCDs and the response to mental health conditions are being regularly included in UNSDCF among SIDS, but there is opportunity to improve how they are incorporated. That includes describing the country/regional burden of NCDs and mental health conditions and clearly defining them as strategic priorities; including SMART indicators; being cognisant of the full range of NCDs and mental health conditions; and detailing progress in evaluation reports.
- Most important, commitments in UNSDCF must be turned into action. This requires sufficient resources and their efficient use, for example through integrated approaches. The UN system must support SIDS countries in this regard. SIDS must hold the UN system accountable for meeting demand.

## 2. Potential inputs into official recommendations

1. The Task Force and its members to determine ways of scaling up support to SIDS countries for the prevention and control of NCDs and mental health conditions across the life-course, with particulate attention to children.
2. The Task Force and its members to identify ways to support SIDS in unlocking additional funding for action to prevent and control NCDs and mental health conditions.
3. The Task Force and its members to consider how to support SIDS in coherent data collection, analytics and use.
4. The Task Force and its members to scale up support to UN country teams and governments in strengthening and implementing commitments in UNSDCF.

## 3. Key quotes

- **Fale Lesa**, NCD Alliance's Our Views Our Voices: *"We were sold a lie. Urbanization would improve our quality of life and provide more opportunity. Instead, it undermined our local food security as families moved into urban dwellings and sold their ancestral land for next to nothing. We were forced to import food from abroad. And because we couldn't afford much, we imported the cheapest cuts of meat and processed crap. The lack of physical activity combined with poor diet led to an obesity epidemic. 8 of the 10 fattest countries in the world are now in the Pacific."*
- **George Alleyne**, Director Emeritus, Pan American Health Organization: *"Data are neutral, they are useless, it is the transformation of data into information that is absolutely critical and [...] many of our countries are data rich and information poor."*
- **Teri-Ann Joseph**, Deputy Chief Medical Officer, Ministry of Health, Wellness & the Environment, Antigua and Barbuda: *"I believe one way of really giving us support and ensuring that we[...] fight against NCDs is to really see how, despite political change, we can have continuity in policies."*
- **Simona Marinescu**, UN Resident Coordinator, Samoa, American Samoa, Cook Islands, Niue and Tokelau: *"Changing systems is not necessarily something that comes easily. We have been around for many years in the Pacific in SIDS, yet we can't see significant impact in improving wellbeing. This is because we have not always had an integrated approach."*

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