Executive Summary

This report summarizes the discussions resulting from the pre-regional caucus that occurred in August, 2016 offering key insights relating to civil society’s engagement in NCD prevention and control.

The caucus involved civil society from the Eastern Mediterranean region and discussed:

- The roles and responsibilities of civil society in the NCD response.
- Regional civil society case studies in the prevention and control of NCDs.
- Distill critical success elements to create a vibrant NCD “whole of society” movement.

The discussions were structured around four key areas central to civil society’s main roles in NCD prevention and control, namely awareness, access, accountability, and advocacy. For each of these, the main contributions, success factors, and challenges faced by civil society were discussed.

Two central themes emerge with relation to civil society’s contributions. Firstly, its role as a generator of knowledge and disseminator of information relevant to a wide variety of audiences (local communities and beyond) were highlighted. Its engagements with government as both an important collaborator as well as watchdog were also recognized. Civil society not only monitors progress towards key targets, but exposes areas of slow progress, challenges policy makers, and calls for transparency. The common success factors raised range from good governance, leadership, effective strategies, and rigorous monitoring and evaluation efforts to the value of maintaining credibility and forming strong multisectoral partnerships.

The caucus discussed challenges faced by CSOs and concluded that these fell under the broad categories of inadequate technical and financial resources, lack of knowledge and skills to function efficiently, problematic relationships with government, and complex bureaucratic or legal systems. Limited collaboration and insufficient collaboration between NGOs was also clearly signalled as an impediment, as was industry interference and the complex issue of conflict of interest.
Ultimately, the meeting served to emphasize the central importance of ensuring a vibrant civil society in making progress against NCDs. In light of global commitments, such as the WHO Global Action plan, the 25x25 targets, and the inclusion of NCDs in the Sustainable Development Goals, an active and vibrant civil society has the power to help accelerate national responses as an integral part of a whole-of-society approach to NCD prevention and control.

**Background**

The pre-dialogue caucus titled “Addressing NCDs as part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development – the contribution of civil society” took place in Jordan on the 15th of August 2016 and was held by the NCD Alliance, a civil society network uniting 2,000 civil society organisations in more than 170 countries. It was held on the occasion of the WHO Eastern Mediterranean Regional Office/NCD Alliance Capacity Development Workshop that also occurred in Jordan on the 15th and 16th of August. The aim of the workshop was to increase the ability of local NCD civil society to build effective NCD alliances, coordinate activities, and engage in effective NCD advocacy.

Regional caucus meetings were held in the lead up to the Global Dialogue being organized by the WHO Global Coordination Mechanism on NCDs on the topic of ‘the Role of Non-State actors in supporting Member States in their national efforts to tackle NCDs as part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development’ occurring in Mauritius on the 19th to 21st of October, 2016. Pre-dialogue caucuses are informal meetings, which are organized independently of WHO.

The NCD Alliance was founded in 2009 and aims to combat the NCD epidemic by putting health at the centre of all policies together with strategic partners, including the World Health Organization, the United Nations, and governments. With an increasing number of national and regional NCD Alliances taking root across regions, the NCD Alliance is uniquely placed to convene the civil society movement and drive the NCD agenda forward.

**Caucus Format and Overview**

Group discussions at the caucus were structured in a world café format, with four facilitators leading conversations on the main arenas of advocacy, accountability, awareness, and access. With respect to each of these, three main themes structured the discussions. These included the unique contributions of civil society in the specific area, the main challenges faced in the EMR by civil society in the specific area, and the top 5 critical success elements of successful and vibrant civil society in this area.

The four facilitators were:

- **Awareness** (Mr Elfatih Abdelraheem, UNDP, Egypt)
- **Access** (Ms Anja Nitzsche-Bell, IAEA, Austria)
- **Advocacy** (Ms Rana Ghafary, Jordan Breast Cancer Program, Jordan)
Participants are included in Annex 1.

**Caucus discussions:**

**Awareness**

Spanning a large variety of efforts aimed at increasing audience knowledge, changing attitudes and behaviours, awareness-raising forms a crucial component of civil society’s contribution to NCD prevention and control. Caucus participants outlined how effective awareness programs tailor messaging to different audiences and leverage CSO’s links with their communities. Furthermore, civil society plays a role in raising awareness with a variety of audiences, including the general public, underserved populations, and even government stakeholders. Several success factors were discussed, including multisectoral partnerships, innovative means of communication about NCDs holistically, inclusion of target populations in planning, and monitoring and evaluation efforts that allow for a continuous process of improvement, clearly emerge. However, efforts were also said to be hampered by lack of funding, weak collaboration with academia in the generation of evidence, lack of rigor in evaluation and assimilation of lessons learnt, as well as competition or duplication between different NGO efforts.

**Advocacy**

Advocacy aims to drive system change. Civil society can access society, empowering the public with knowledge, generating grassroots capacity, conveying the needs of local communities and advocating for their rights, creating pressure for policy change, pushing for the improvement of policies, legislation and funding for NCD prevention and control.

Ensuring freedom from conflicts of interest, conducting rigorous evaluation, focusing on beneficiaries, forming technical partnerships that heighten credibility (such as with WHO collaborating centres), and harnessing civil society’s diversity, credibility and capacity for innovation in mobilizing communities and ensuring leaders’ ongoing commitment to NCDs were all discussed as advocacy success factors. However, challenges faced by CSOs in advocacy include industry interference, segregated efforts or weak inter-NGO collaboration, lack of resources (technical, human and financial), changes in government and political bodies, as well as unsteady support, insufficient involvement of civil society by government in planning and implementation of interventions, and general resistance from government to meaningful involvement of civil society in policy making processes.
**Access**

Ensuring access to high quality NCD care can be a challenge even in well-resourced settings. Civil society plays a pivotal role in this arena through its multi-faceted engagement in expanding the reach of services. Efforts range from the provision of financing, delivery of high-quality and patient-friendly health services (including free care for vulnerable populations, such as refugee populations – a particular area of focus in this specific region), legal support, mediation between community members and government, to prevention programs. Caucus participants argued that chances of success are maximized by means of good governance, effective leadership from external ambassadors including religious leaders, availability of committed volunteers, supportive media, and the creation of patient-friendly environments. The obstacles that must be overcome encompass lack of funding and expertise, problematic relations with government, weak collaboration between NGOs, and potential conflict of interest in partnerships with industry.

**Accountability**

Ensuring accountability through a cyclical process of monitoring, review, and remedial action can be a crucial tool for tracking progress on NCDs and a powerful engine of political and programmatic change. According to caucus participants, programs are made more likely to succeed by creating good relationships with key contacts in government and articulating precise and clear requests, and ensuring downward accountability to communities throughout implementation to maintain responsiveness. Common hindrances raised include lack of expertise or knowledge of rights, complex bureaucratic or legal systems, and a problematically unclear distinction between civil society and government, which underlines the need for independence. Collectively, these efforts relating to accountability contribute by monitoring progress towards agreed targets, challenging governments and demanding transparency, as well as empowering communities.

**Conclusion**

Through its contributions related to Advocacy, Awareness, Accountability, and Access, civil society will play an increasingly prominent role in achieving progress on NCD prevention and control at both the national and regional levels. When empowered and engaged, civil society can serve as the bridge between global commitments and action, which is vital in the creation of the necessary political leadership and whole-of-society approach to effective action on NCDs. Due to their proximity and strong ties within communities, civil society organisations have the potential of serving as the voice of people impacted by NCDs within decision-making arenas. Capable of holding governments and other sectors accountable to their commitments, civil society organizations also have the ability to coordinate and raise public demand, engage with and pressure governments, and ensure that affected communities benefit from available resources and services. These contributions make CSOs vital players in national and regional NCD efforts. Finally, by
collaborating and pooling leadership, technical expertise, resources, and networks aimed at a common agenda, the NCD alliance continues to emphasize the importance of coalition-building between CSOs as a key component of achieving a coordinated and mobilized civil society movement within countries.
Annex 1 – List of Participants

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