Non-communicable diseases (NCDs), mainly cardiovascular diseases (heart disease and strokes), cancers, diabetes and chronic lung disease, are today the leading causes of disease burden and death worldwide. They share four major causative risk factors (tobacco use, unhealthy diet, lack of physical activity, and the harmful use of alcohol). Around 36 million people died from NCDs in 2008. More than 9.1 million people died from NCDs too young - before the age of 60. Nearly 90% of these premature deaths occurred in low- and middle-income countries. The consequences of NCDs extend beyond health to include serious social and economic dimensions.

Despite their enormously increasing magnitude and grave consequences, NCDs remain hidden and under-recorded; their impact on family income, productivity and development is poorly recognized. The health-care needs in low- and middle-income countries are rising to unprecedented levels and health-care costs are escalating, overwhelming health systems in low- and middle-income countries.

This Round Table will enable a discussion on the global burden of NCDs, which currently constitutes one of the major challenges for development in the 21st century. NCDs pose an enormous burden on health, curtails economic growth and represents a major social challenge in all countries. This Round Table will also highlight the need to raise the priority accorded to NCDs at the highest levels of governments and discuss mechanisms for monitoring their risk factors and determinants and assessing actions taken to reduce them.

Overview

Non-communicable diseases (NCDs) is as much of an economic and social problem, as a public health one: eleven years since the landmark World Health Assembly endorsed the Global Strategy for the Prevention and Control of NCDs, there are new developments which have led to the High-level Meeting of the United Nations General Assembly at this juncture.

NCDs are the biggest global killers today. Sixty-three percent of all deaths in 2008 -- 36 million people -- were caused by NCDs. More than 9.1 million people died from NCDs before the age of 60. Nearly 90% of these premature deaths occurred in low- and middle-
income countries. The number of deaths from NCDs are expected to increase substantially in the future, particularly in low- and middle-income countries. By 2020, the largest increases in NCD mortality will occur in Africa.

In addition to their enormous health impact, NCDs are now emerging to have a seriously negative impact on human development in social and economic terms. NCDs reduce productivity and contribute to poverty. They create a heavy financial burden on health systems and increasingly negative consequences on the economy, even in high-income countries.

There is also clear evidence that NCDs can impede progress towards the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and that they must be tackled if the global development is to achieve its targets.

**Key issues**

### NCDs are hidden, misunderstood and under-recorded
- The rapidly increasing burden of NCDs, particularly in low- and middle-income countries over the past decade has remained relatively hidden from the public domain.
- There is still insufficient statistical data on NCDs and current capacities for surveillance of NCDs are inadequate in many countries.
- Policy makers may not recognize that the NCD epidemic is largely preventable by government-led action -- in close collaboration with civil society and the private sector..

### NCDs curtail economic growth
- The enormous magnitude of NCDs, the disabilities and premature deaths they cause and the long-term care required, lead to reduced productivity and increase in health-care costs, thereby weakening national economic development.
- Current global losses in national income from premature deaths amount to hundreds of billions of dollars in 2010, and are set to increase considerably by the year 2025.
- NCDs lock millions of people into chronic poverty every year due to impact on household income.

### NCDs lead to unprecedented health-care needs in low- and middle-income countries
- Many low- and middle-income countries are now suffering from a double burden of disease. This phenomenon means that the already over-stretched public health services will now have to also cope with the increasing trend of NCDs.
- A large proportion of people with high risk of NCDs remain undiagnosed in low- and middle-income countries, and even those diagnosed have insufficient access to treatment at the primary health-care level.

### Health spending in high-income countries rises faster than economic growth
- Health spending continues to rise faster than economic growth in most high-income countries. In the past ten years, health expenditures in OECD countries have increased by 50% in real terms. In seven OECD countries, they account for more than 10% of the economy.

### NCDs impact the achievement of internationally agreed development goals
- NCDs have a negative impact on family income, because a substantial proportion of household income is spent on health-care in low-income countries.
- Costs for NCD-related health care, medicines, tobacco and alcohol displace household resources that might otherwise be available for education.
- Improper nutrition during pregnancy is associated with stillbirths and pre-term births and leads to higher rates of diabetes and high blood pressure later in life.
− The rising prevalence of high blood pressure and gestational diabetes is increasing the adverse outcomes of pregnancy and maternal health. Diabetes during pregnancy presents serious risks to both the mother and the baby.
− The increasing burden of NCDs also interferes with effective tuberculosis control.

**Way forward**

− Shared responsibility to acknowledge the magnitude of the NCD epidemic and strengthen political commitment to prevent and control NCDs at the highest levels of government.

− Shared responsibility and commitment to integrate NCD prevention and control into national and global development agendas.

− Shared responsibility to map and monitor NCDs and their risk factors and determinants and build effective NCD surveillance systems, as an integral part of national health information systems.

− Shared responsibility to develop a global monitoring framework to assess NCD trends and the progress countries will make to address NCDs. The WHO Global Status Report on NCDs (2010) provides a baseline for national and global monitoring of NCDs.