International experience indicates that countries can make substantial achievements in reducing the disease burden, disabilities, and premature mortality caused by NCDs. Evidence shows that such achievements can be made by strengthening surveillance of NCDs and their determinants, by implementing cost-effective measures to reduce risk factors through active engagement of the various government sectors, civil society and the private sectors, and by promoting access to early detection and treatment interventions by strengthening health systems.

However, while establishing and strengthening national programmes is key, inter-country collaboration and international coordination constitute a fundamental component of the global struggle against NCDs and are essential for supporting and reinforcing action at the country level.

This Round Table will review the pivotal role that international cooperation, coordinated action and solidarity play in reducing the global NCD burden, through an overarching framework that covers:

- Surveillance and monitoring of NCDs and risk factors
- Reducing the level of shared risk factors and determinants
- Strengthening health care for people with NCDs

Overview

There are major milestones in the global struggle against NCDs. In 2000, the World Health Assembly endorsed the Global Strategy for the Prevention and Control of NCDs, which provide the key strategic directions for global and country action. The strategy aims to map the emerging epidemics of NCDs, reduce the level of exposure of individuals and populations to the common risk factors for NCDs, and to strengthen health care for people with NCDs.

In 2008, an Action Plan was developed by WHO and Member States to translate the Global Strategy into concrete action. The Global Strategy and its Action Plan emphasize the importance of international cooperation and coordination in achieving the necessary leverage and synergy to address the NCD challenge. Concerted action against NCDs on a global scale requires Member States and all partners to play a stronger role in a global network that targets areas such as advocacy, monitoring, resource mobilization, capacity-building and collaborative research.

Key issues
Fostering international cooperation to monitor NCDs

- A comprehensive framework for monitoring is essential. A broad framework and core indicators for NCD surveillance have been developed by WHO. The framework and core indicators were included in the WHO Global Status Report on NCDs (2010). Based on the above, a WHO Technical Working Group on NCD Targets has proposed a preliminary set of recommendations on targets for achievement by 2025 to monitor progress in reducing the burden of NCDs. The proposed targets are being subjected to in-depth technical discussion and debate with Member States. The process to further develop and finalize the proposed targets will be decided by Member States.

- As the common strategic framework for the operational activities of the United Nations system at the country level, the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) provides a collective, coherent and integrated response to national priorities and needs. The multisectoral nature of the response to NCDs makes UNDAF a natural framework to strengthen surveillance systems and contribute data on NCD trends, their risk factors and social determinants.

Fostering international cooperation to reduce exposure to NCD risk factors

- **Tobacco control as a blueprint**
  Strengthening multisectoral mechanisms for tobacco control are crucial in fostering international cooperation to reduce global tobacco consumption. In this respect, the work of the United Nations Ad Hoc Interagency Task Force on Tobacco Control, established by the Secretary General in 1999, will be scaled up in order to intensify a joint response, particularly on the economic and social aspects of tobacco production. There are other strategic opportunities to strengthen multisectoral action, particularly through the implementation of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control.

**Promoting healthy diet**

There is a pressing need for increased cooperation between WHO, other UN agencies, development agencies, civil society organizations and the private sector in promoting healthy diet and in implementing the Global Strategy on Diet, Physical Activity and Health. Initiatives should include mechanisms to ensure policy coherence and joint action to intensify collaboration in nutrition-related areas. Intergovernmental response is also needed in relation to the production, trade and marketing of food products that are risk factors for NCDs. Concrete instruments can be developed to create a healthier food environment and establish composition standards, like setting targets for salt content of food products, banning of industrially produced trans fat, and restricting marketing of food and non-alcoholic beverages to children.

- **Developing innovative mechanisms for sustainable health financing**
  Higher taxes on products that are harmful to health have the dual benefit of improving the health of the population through reduced consumption while raising more funds. Tobacco and alcohol taxes are widely collected across countries, but are often applied at low rates so that the potential to increase revenue by raising tax rates still exists. Also, less than 15% of countries report that they earmark tobacco tax revenues to fund NCD prevention and control, and this is lower in low- and lower-middle-income countries.

- **Strengthening multisectoral action**
  Recognizing the complex network of social and economic determinants of health demands a whole-of-government approach to health promotion and NCD prevention. There is a need to develop effective inter-departmental and multisectoral joint work and impact assessments relevant to all sectors. There is a need to disseminate lessons learned, based on review of international experience on multisectoral and inter-ministerial approaches and for sustained political commitment to strengthen effective structures that promote intersectoral action.
− **Uniting UN funds, programmes, and agencies around a common agenda**
  Members of the UN system have an important role to play in advancing development and in addressing NCDs in accordance with national strategies and priorities. Interagency coordination needs to be scaled up for a strong, and well-coordinated response to address NCDs.

**Fostering international cooperation to strengthen health care for people with NCDs**

− **Investing in health systems and moving towards universal coverage**
  All countries have scope to develop their health financing systems to move closer to universal coverage. This involves three inter-related actions. The first is to raise more money for health domestically, provided governments and the people commit to doing so, by: (i) Increasing the efficiency of revenue collection; (ii) Reprioritizing government budgets and (iii) Innovative financing. The second is to reduce financial barriers to services and increase financial risk protection. The third is to improve efficiency and equity in the way available resources are used. The global movement for universal coverage provides opportunities for synergy to address NCD.

− **Delivering effective international aid for NCD prevention**
  Technical support to low-income countries to address NCDs is not given priority by many international development agencies and it currently constitutes a small proportion of official development assistance. In line with the Paris Declaration and the Accra Agenda for Action, many countries are aligning the inputs of development partners behind their priorities. The Paris Declaration and the Accra Agenda provide opportunities for synergy to address NCDs.

− **Improving access to medicines**
  MDG Target 8 aspires to provide access to affordable essential drugs in developing countries. However, international efforts to provide access to essential medicines are generally limited to AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria. Cost-effective essential medicines to treat many NCDs are available in low-cost generic forms, although they remain inaccessible and unaffordable to many who need them. While scaling up access to NCD medicines can be achieved by a combination of policies and programmatic options suited to countries’ situations, concerted global efforts and international cooperation are also essential. At the international level, existing efforts to ensure access to some NCD medicines could be expanded to make cancer and other expensive medicines available together with essential diagnostic products.

**Way forward**

− **Developing an updated global multisectoral action plan**
  The 2008-2013 Action Plan of the Global Strategy will need to be updated and a new global multisectoral action plan should be developed, based on the Global Strategy and the Political Declaration of the UN High-level Meeting. This will require extensive collaboration with Member States as well as consultation with other stakeholders.

**International coordination**
  It is widely acknowledged that an increasing number of stakeholders seek to participate, and have their voices heard, in the shaping and making of health policy. The Global Noncommunicable Disease Network (NCDnet) was established in 2009 as a voluntary collaborative arrangement comprising United Nations agencies, intergovernmental organizations, academia, research centres, NGOs, and the business community. The current focus is on coordinating the activities of all stakeholders to support the implementation of the Action Plan for the Global Strategy for the Prevention and Control of NCDs, which was endorsed by the World Health Assembly in 2008. The role of the NCDnet has to expand in order to strengthen coordination and joint work in updating the Action Plan and in implementing the Political Declaration of the United Nations High-level Meeting.