

This NCD Alliance briefing document provides guidance to national and regional advocates regarding the 2018 UN High-level Political Forum (HLPF) and outlines opportunities for engagement. References are indicated with a hyperlinked asterisk\*.

## Background

The 2018 HLPF will take place at UN headquarters in New York from 9-18 July, with the Ministerial segment taking place from 16 – 18 July. Member State representatives convene to discuss progress and challenges in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. The HLPF is the main platform for follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals. For more information on the scope, process, and level of participation at the HLPF, please refer to the 2017 HLPF Advocacy Briefing.\*

This year's HLPF will be the second time the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are reviewed at the United Nations. Member States will discuss a sub-set of goals under the theme 'Transformation towards sustainable and resilient societies,' reviewing in depth SDG 6 on clean water and sanitation; SDG 7 on affordable and clean energy; SDG 11 on sustainable cities and communities; SDG 12 on responsible consumption and production; SDG 15 on responsible consumption and production, and SDG 17 on partnerships for the goals.

## The HLPF Annual Themes and Goals



**2017**  
Eradicating poverty and promoting prosperity in a changing world



**2018**  
Transformation towards sustainable and resilient societies



**2019**  
Empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality



## Why the HLPF Matters for the NCD and Global Health Community

While SDG 3 on health will not be formally reviewed at the HLPF this year, the meeting still provides an important advocacy opportunity for the NCD and wider health community. One of the most fundamental principles of the SDGs is that they are 'integrated and indivisible,' meaning progress on any one goal or target cannot be achieved without progress in many other sustainable development priority areas. Health is both an indicator of and a prerequisite for sustainable social and economic development, and NCDs are linked with the achievement of many of the SDGs.\*

Many interventions to address health offer clear environmental co-benefits. The synergies between NCDs and other health priorities, and the six goals under review are manifold, as set out in this advocacy briefing. The 2018 HLPF provides an opportunity for civil society advocates to highlight these interlinkages to their governments and representatives, and to showcase opportunities for co-benefit actions and interventions. It is also an opportunity to strengthen ties with civil society in the environmental and sustainable development fields in order to further collaboration across sectors and deliver on the integrated nature of the SDGs.

## Key Messages

- Human and planetary health are intrinsically linked.
- Industrial development and urbanisation present major challenges for both planet and people, but we have an opportunity to shape these processes in order to protect and promote human and planetary health.
- Many interventions to address health offer clear environmental co-benefits: strategic decisions made in sectors including education, transport, energy, agriculture and food, education, urban planning, labour, and waste management impact on health and can accrue health benefits and savings.
- The upstream drivers, challenges and solutions for sustainable environments and health share many commonalities, including the need to combat commercial industries and interests where these pose a threat, and the role of fiscal policies (both taxation and subsidies).
- Dialogue and coordination across multiple government departments at national and municipal levels, together with UN and international institutions, civil society, citizens, relevant private sector and academia.

## How do NCDs and other health priorities fit into the HLPF review theme?

Industrial development and urbanisation have permanently altered the physical and social environments which shape the lives and health outcomes of people worldwide. As of 2014, over half of the global population lives in urban areas, and while development advances provide new technologies which in many ways enrich societies and drive progress, they also place increasing demands on energy resources. Sheer rates of population growth fuel rapidly rising demand in all regions. Short-sighted definitions of progress are driving actions which sentence future generations to unhealthy, unprosperous, unsustainable lives. Targeted investment of financial and technical resources to interventions of demonstrable success is vital to avert greater economic and human cost across future generations.



**THE GLOBAL GOALS**  
For Sustainable Development

Globally, 23% of all deaths could be prevented through healthier environments. Nearly two thirds of the 12.6 million deaths caused by the environment each year are due to NCDs. Air pollution alone is estimated to cause up to one sixth of NCDs - 24% of all adult deaths from heart disease, 25% from stroke, 43% from chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and 29% from lung cancer.\* Soil and water pollution in community, household, and occupational settings also associated with a heavy burden of disease. Sources of pollution include fossil fuels, heavy metals, pesticides and other toxic chemicals which pollute the wider environment through vehicle use, agricultural processes, mining, and waste disposal.

The growing dialogue among the NCD and global health community on the subject of the 'commercial determinants of health' is also pertinent to environmental issues. Industries including fossil fuels, pesticides, motorised transport, and mining have negative impacts on both human and planetary health. In addition, expertise in solutions to reduce consumption of unhealthy commodities (from tobacco to coal), including taxation and divestment - and subsidies and investment to increase access to healthy and sustainable alternatives (from vegetables to solar energy) is highly transferrable.

## Links between NCDs, Health, and the SDGs Under Review

### SDG 6. Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all



Over one quarter of the world's population has no access to a safe water supply.\* Access to safe water is a recognised necessity to prevent infectious diseases, but links with NCDs are less well acknowledged. There is increasing evidence which demonstrates the links between arsenic in drinking water with hypertension, cardiovascular disease, and some cancers.\* High levels of arsenic in drinking water and food affects over 200 million people in 70 countries.\* Drinking water delivered through lead pipes or pipes joined with lead solder may contain lead, which can affect brain development and also cause anaemia, hypertension, cardiovascular disease, and renal impairment, with particular risk to children.\* Mining practices can lead to contamination of water supplies with mercury, causing neurological and behavioural disorders.\* Pesticides used in agriculture contaminate water supplies and in some cases cause cancer, neurological disorders and endocrine disruption. Availability of safe water which is free from both chemicals and disease vectors will help reduce the burden of NCDs and other diseases.

## SDG 7. Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all



Fossil fuel emissions, including those resulting from electricity generation, motorised vehicles, cooking, heating and lighting, negatively impact health, with indoor and outdoor air pollution causing 7 million deaths annually. Emissions from coal, oil and gas are high in particulate matter, including short-lived climate pollutants (SLCPs) such as black carbon, which have significant impacts on respiratory and cardiovascular health, coupled with rapid effects on global warming. Access to clean fuels and technologies for cooking, heating and lighting is vital in order to reduce indoor air pollution which particularly impacts women and children, while reform at city level is especially key to address outdoor air pollution (see SDG 11). In 2014, G20 governments paid out 444 billion USD in subsidies to fossil fuel companies, while the use of fossil fuels resulted in estimated health costs six times greater – 2.76 trillion USD.\* Ending fossil fuel subsidies, divesting from fossil fuels, and introducing a carbon tax releases funds which can instead be invested in sustainable energy alternatives. A transition towards renewable energy sources, which produce little to no emissions (such as wind, solar, geothermal and hydroelectric power) offers substantial health benefits, preventing NCDs and mitigating climate change. The United Kingdom and Canada are leading a new global coalition launched in November 2017, the 'Powering Past Coal Alliance', together with over 20 countries and other stakeholders, aimed at accelerating clean growth and achieving phase-out of traditional coal power.\*

## SDG 11. Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable



Sustainable urbanisation offers one of the greatest opportunities for the protection and promotion of the health of future generations, while unsustainable urbanisation leads to increased exposure to three major risk factors for NCDs: air pollution, unhealthy diets, and physical inactivity. In addition to SDG 11, governments have committed to the New Urban Agenda, which places health high on the list of priorities for sustainable urbanisation.\* However, 98% of cities in low- and middle-income countries with more than 100,000 inhabitants do not meet WHO air quality guidelines, with highly concentrated populations, transport, and industrial activity.\* Availability of healthy, fresh and affordable food is also a challenge in cities, with local public markets selling nutritious produce being replaced by fast food outlets and supermarkets which offer processed foods high in sugar, salt and fat. 3.2 million deaths annually are attributable to physical inactivity,\* with sedentary behaviour in cities increasing due to use of motorised transport, office jobs replacing outdoor occupations, and limited access to parks for recreational exercise. Total global annual passenger transport is set to more than double from 50 to 120 trillion kilometres between 2015 and 2050,\* with comparative increases in harmful emissions. Promoting active transport (i.e. forms of transport which involve physical activity, such as cycling and walking) and recreational physical activity through creation of cycling networks, bike share schemes, pedestrianised streets, lower speed limits, wider sidewalks, and green spaces has the triple benefit of combatting emissions, enabling physical exercise as part of daily routine, and reducing road traffic accidents. Notably, there is no mention of active transport modes in SDG target 11.2, which focusses exclusively on access to public transport with no mention of walking or cycling. Yet if half of short trips were made by bicycle in the Upper Midwestern region of the United States alone, USD 3.8 billion would be saved annually from avoided mortality and health care costs.\*

## SDG 12. Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns



Consumption and production patterns directly impact NCD risk. In the case of food, excessive consumption of animal products (particularly red meat and dairy) has detrimental impacts on climate and health. In contrast, a plant-based diet is positive for health and protective against NCDs. Livestock production is responsible for 18% of global greenhouse gas emissions - more than all forms of transport combined. This is due to the combined effect of burning fuel to produce fertilizer to grow feed, production and transportation of meat, clearing grazing land, and emissions directly from livestock.\* Chronic exposure to hazardous pesticides used in agriculture can affect skin, eyes, nervous system, cardiovascular system, gastrointestinal tract, liver, kidneys, reproductive system, and endocrine system.\* More broadly, unsafe lead acid battery recycling and burning of e-waste can contaminate entire neighbourhoods.\* Reducing all forms of waste and carefully managing disposal processes has protective effects for both health and environment.

## SDG 15. Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss



Managing forests and combatting desertification are core priorities for mitigation of climate change and its threats to human and planetary health. An increasing body of evidence indicates that exposure to biodiverse green spaces, particularly in urban settings, can provide many health benefits for people living with NCDs, including improved psychological, cognitive and physiological health.\* Deforestation leads to decreased biodiversity, and reduced availability of many species on which people rely for food and medicine, and also contributes to global warming. Land degradation threatens access to healthy, fresh and affordable food and also impairs carbon sequestration, accelerating climate change.

## SDG 17. Partnerships for the goals



A whole of government, whole of society approach is needed to address health and environmental priorities. Strategic decisions made in sectors including education, transport, energy, agriculture and food, education, urban planning, labour, and waste management impact on health and can accrue health benefits and savings, simultaneously advancing social, economic and environmental development. It is therefore critical that health impacts are assessed during both the development of policies and plans across these sectors, and when monitoring their impact. Leadership by Heads of State and by Mayors is vital in order to ensure coordination and a health in all policies approach. All sectors of society have a role to play, including national and local governments, UN and international institutions, civil society, citizens, relevant private sector and academia. While many public-partnerships are a force for good in protecting human and planetary health, care should be taken to avoid incompatible partnerships where the motives of one or more parties are not aligned with the promotion of human and planetary health and conflicts of interest arise. While parts of the private sector have an important role to play in protecting human and planetary health, the private sector is not homogenous, and the degree to which a business or other entity's interests may drive are positive or negative outcomes for human and planetary health depends on their specific practices and portfolio.

### Opportunities for governments to recognise health and environmental co-benefits at the HLPF

**Voluntary National Reviews:** Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) are state-led and prepared by a government to share their experience in implementing the SDGs under review. 47 Member States are due to submit VNRs for the 2018 HLPF.\* VNRs include successes, challenges, and lessons learned, and should be developed in a consultative and inclusive manner involving all major groups and other stakeholders. The VNR is an important monitoring tool. An evaluation of Member States' 2018 VNRs gives an indication of the extent to which the linkages between health and environment priorities are currently recognised.

**Statements at the HLPF:** In addition to submitting VNRs, Member States can deliver oral statements at the HLPF, usually during the three-day Ministerial Segment. This is an opportunity to advocate for the links between NCDs and the goals under review to be highlighted at the HLPF, and advocacy to encourage governments to include NCDs and other health priorities in their statement can be successful.



### Useful Resources

- NCDs Across SDGs: A call for an integrated approach. NCD Alliance; 2016. [Link](#).
- Preventing noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) by reducing environmental risk factors. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2017. [Link](#).
- Preventing disease through healthy environments: a global assessment of the burden of disease from environmental risks. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2016. [Link](#).
- The Public Health Impact of Chemicals: Knowns and Unknowns. World Health Organization; 2016. [Link](#).
- Ten Chemicals of Major Public Health Concern. Online: World Health Organization. [Link](#).
- New Coalition on health, environment and climate change. Online: World Health Organization. [Link](#).
- Towards a Pollution Free Planet. UNEP/EA.3/L.19: UN Environment Assembly Ministerial Declaration 2017. [Link](#)
- Pollution and non-communicable disease: time to end the neglect. Fuller R et al. Lancet; online 2018. [Link](#).
- Reducing NCDs globally: the under-recognised role of environmental risk factors. Chowdry R et al. Lancet; online 2018. [Link](#).
- Inclusion of Health Priorities in the New Urban Agenda: Letter to Habitat III Co-facilitators. NCD Alliance et al; 2016. [Link](#).
- NCDs and Climate Change: Shared Opportunities for Action. NCD Alliance; 2016. [Link](#).
- Breathe Life Infographics Library. Online: Climate and Clean Air Coalition. [Link](#).