

Taskforce statement at WHO event, March 23, 2016, New York

At the WHO GCM side event, New York, 23 March 2016

Time for Action: Women Mobilizing Against Noncommunicable Diseases

*By Nalini Saligram**

It is a privilege to speak on behalf of the Taskforce on Women & NCDs, a coalition of 18 organizations committed to responding to the growing and unique burden of NCDs on women. Two of my colleagues are here today, co-chair Diana Vaca Mcghie from the American Heart Association and Ann McMikel from the American Cancer Society, one of the founding forces of our Taskforce.

The excitement, passion and determination of the women in this room and indeed of the thousands of women in New York this week, are inspiring. At this CSW meeting, the first after women and girls were highlighted in the Sustainable Development Goals, we've been impressed with the arguments that have been presented in gatherings big and small, on gender equality, and on women's empowerment and the link to sustainable development.

As the Taskforce on Women and NCDs, we wish to highlight the unique and critical role of civil society in championing the patient voice and call for a stronger grassroots response to the growing threat of NCDs on women in the developing world.

1. We women want to leave the world a better place for our children and for future generations. For this we call for active collaboration, and to quit working in silos. The NCD movement can be helped by strategically integrating with the traditional Women's movement. We are learning more about the strong link between maternal mortality and NCDs; that NCDs are a major reason why pregnant women die and that they contribute to subsequent cycles of chronic disease across generations. In fact, we know that NCDs are the major reason why all women die. Shouldn't the #1 reason for women's mortality, NCDs like heart disease, become our #1 priority? In the NCD community we speak the health language, but must improve by integrating women's rights arguments into our messaging, and learning how to make in-your-face demands with confidence. Forging strong alliances with women's groups will get us there.
2. A woman's life is more than her reproductive years. We at the Taskforce believe we must nurture a woman throughout her life from birth, through her 5th birthday, her adolescence, the reproductive years, and beyond, into her old age. We advocate for a lifecourse approach to tackling NCDs.
3. Finally, we firmly believe that women are a powerful solution to the NCD crisis. Women make decisions everyday about the food their families eat and the physical activities their children engage in, and can steer their families towards healthy living. It is therefore critical to recruit women and women's group leaders to advance the fight against NCDs.

We commend the WHO GCM for getting this group of forward thinking women – and a few good men! – together to think through strategies to engage and empower women and transform the world we live in.

From the Taskforce we pledge to collaborate with you all, using the might and reach of our members to mobilize world leaders on this issue. We will share our ideas including elements of our compelling I'm NCD Positive campaign. This campaign builds on each one of us being affected by NCDs in different ways - as patients, caregivers, mothers, wives, daughters, and world citizens.

I believe that it is our generation's responsibility to leave the world a healthier place, and I want to thank the Global Co-ordinating Mechanism of the World Health Organization, personally, and on behalf of the Taskforce on Women & NCDs, for giving us the platform to do so.

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