

**Should the G20 Summit Respond to the Call of the UN Summit on NCDs?
A Full Fledged Whole-of-Society Approach to NCD Prevention and Control -**

Commentary Summary

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On September 19-20th 2011, the United Nations (UN) convened, in New York, a global summit attended by Heads of State and Governments to curb the NCD epidemic afflicting both the developed and developing countries. After several months of active negotiations facilitated by the ambassadors of Jamaica and Luxembourg, the UN General Assembly unanimously adopted on September 16th, 2011 a political declaration that acknowledged the global scope of the crisis and identified the key components of a “whole-of-government” and “whole-of -society” response that is crucially needed¹. While most view the declaration in positive light, not much detail has been provided as to what these expressions means,

We propose that Government be considered part of the whole of society, and we articulate below the what key tenets of a full-fledged WoS approach to NCD prevention and control should be. Additionally, the next major opportunity to address NCDs will be at the upcoming G20 Summit this November. We entail why it is critical that this WoS approach is furthered and deliberated upon at the G20 summit, if the successes of the UN NCD Summit are to be advanced.

Key Tenets of a Full-Fledged Whole-of-Society Approach

1) *Centered on Individuals*

A full-fledged WoS approach to NCD prevention and control places the individual at the centre of society’s efforts to design more effective and targeted solutions to the NCD crises. The full array of biological, psychological, social, economic, cultural and political processes and conditions that shape lifestyle, health and disease need to be considered. A fuller consideration of the diversity of human motives blocking and facilitating a move toward healthy lifestyles and compliance with disease control strategies should impact both policy making and transformative innovation.

2) *Health Systems as Part of the Whole-Of-Society*

In most nations, health systems are organized in a way that makes them hard pressed to respond to chronic illness. Health systems must be redesigned to be seen as a catalyst for convergence between health and other human motives driving the choice and behavior of individuals and society at large. A full-fledged WoS approach would move beyond governance for health/disease prevention and control to governance for health and economic convergence. It would consider policy, investment, and innovation in health within the context of economic and other non-health motives and processes driving society.

3) *Harnessing Grassroot and Community Involvement*

Work by 2009 Nobel Laureate of Economics, Elinor Ostrom, underscores the power of taking local community systems as the anchor for analysis and interventions and viewing them as key in “designing complexity to govern complexity.”² Public, private and community actors in community-level systems possess a rich diversity of local knowledge and resources about specific complex interactions and concerns related to natural and human capital in need of being more powerfully harnessed and nested within higher-scale society systems A full-fledged WoS approach to NCD prevention and control will have to develop novel links between communities and policies and investments made at higher-scale jurisdictions and geographies.

4) *Scaling up Business Engagement and Multi-level Cross Sector Partnership*

Business engagement and multi-level cross-sector partnership must be one of the key elements in a WoS transformation, including business innovation that seeks to create “shared value”, or value that enhances the competitiveness of the company while simultaneously advancing the economic and social conditions in the communities in which a company

¹ Political Declaration of the High-Level Meeting on Non-Communicable Diseases Prevention and Control: United Nations General Assembly; 2011.

² Ostrom E. A general framework for analyzing sustainability of social-ecological systems. *Science* 2009;325:419.



operates³. Business engagement further calls for novel collaborative mechanisms and relevant sectoral and cross-sectoral health and economic convergence metrics to support a common decision-making process among potentially conflicting or synergistic policy and investment domains like agriculture, development, education, health, and trade, among others.

The role of the business in the negotiations of the political declaration for the Summit has been controversial. Many industries are seen as contributing directly to the unhealthy environments that have led to the rise of NCDs and the cost of their management. Therefore, to deal with this potential conflict of interest, a full-fledged WoS approach will require a pragmatic approach to specify conflict of interest in the context of business engagement and multi-level cross-sector partnership.

5) *Governing For Health and Economic Convergence*

If a full-fledged whole-of-governance approach is to be at the core of WoS transformation, we need to move to a framework where all policies are examined from the perspective of health and economic convergence and where shared societal and economic value creation is the goal. Approaches to NCD governance need to work towards creating paths of convergence which consider health and economic goals of all actors involved and focus on expanding the total pool of societal and economic value created for any given level of investment made by society in health and related social and economic sectors. It requires fully embracing the diversity of their roles and policy levers to guide society in ensuring that, in each of the choices made, the largest share of societal and economic value is achieved. Organizations and partnerships that endorse health and economic convergence not only from within health but also from *outside* the health sector are more likely to succeed in curbing the NCD epidemic.

Why and How Should the G20 Summit Respond to the Call of the UN Summit on NCDs?

The next opportunity to act on the calls made at the UN Summit is at the G20 summit in Cannes. The G20 is a key forum to address and advance the prevention and control of NCDs as it governs critical interconnected economic, development and health issues through a comprehensive, coherent approach. G20 leaders thus have a compelling reason to act at home and abroad, as soaring health-care costs and debt crises create an impetus to stem the burden of NCDs, especially if they are to meet commitments, made at the 2010 Toronto summit, to cut the fiscal deficit in half as a share of GDP by 2013. To advance their own responsibilities and the global cause of NCD prevention and control through a WoS approach, the Cannes G20 summit should take several feasible steps, as follows:

Step 1) Take the NCD issue beyond the single pillar of the development agenda where it was introduced at the last G20 summit in Seoul, Korea in November 2010. They need to recognize its relevance to several other core components of their actions at Cannes, including its relevance to their efforts to cut fiscal deficits and deal with ongoing debt crises.

Step 2) Mobilize the power of the business, social and young entrepreneurs summit to take up the NCD issue and integrate it with their core concerns. This step promises to provide greater innovation, balance and implantation capacity for what the government leaders, in the very short G20, summit itself can do.

Step 3) Endorse and implement recommendations from Bill Gates that views higher taxes on alcohol as an attractive way to raise the new resources for global public goods, such as health, at a time when the official development assistance budgets of donor governments are badly strained.

Step 4) Force closer, mutually supportive connections between the G20 and “G192” at the UN, by having the G20 actively follow up on the UN’s NCD summit in September, such as through the G20 inviting the World Health Organization and its regional partners to conduct an assessment of how commitments made at Cannes impact NCDs.

Step 5) Commission the IMF, OECD, and World Bank to undertake an assessment of the fiscal and economic costs of the rising NCD burden, and to determine what policy adjustments would be most cost effective and sustainable in terms of economic growth and human health.

Step 6) Add a “knowledge sharing” component to the development action plan, to share globally the best practical measures, especially those that can be taken by public-private-civil society partnerships.

³ Porter M, Kramer M. Creating shared value. Harvard business review 2011;89:2