



World Health Organization Consultation on the draft “Terms of reference for the United Nations Interagency Task Force on the Prevention and Control of Non-Communicable Diseases”

Response from WCRF International, 12th November 2013

About WCRF International

World Cancer Research Fund International (WCRF International) leads and unifies a network of cancer charities dedicated to the prevention and control of cancer through diet, physical activity and body weight.

We finance cutting-edge research, bring together the scientific research on the link between food, nutrition, physical activity, body weight, alcohol and cancer, and communicate this evidence to scientists, health professionals and policy-makers around the world.

In our policy work, we advocate for the wider implementation of more effective policies that enable people to follow our Recommendations for Cancer Prevention. The evidence shows this will reduce the chances of people developing cancer and other NCDs.

Summary Points

- The first draft Terms of Reference (TOR) for the UN Interagency Taskforce contains many of the key elements needed but requires some streamlining and focusing
- The Task Force should be driven by the objectives of the Global NCD Action Plan.
- A set of key functions should be established to ensure the Task Force advances progress towards achieving these objectives. These functions should be specified according to how the Taskforce can add value relative to other processes and mechanisms.
- All agencies should be engaged and encouraged to play an active role in the work of the Task Force.

Recommendations

Following the 2011 UN Political Declaration on NCDs, WCRF International has strongly supported the development of the WHO’s global architecture for NCDs. We welcome the establishment of a United Nations Interagency Task Force as an integral part of this architecture and the realisation of the commitments in the Political Declaration and the WHO’s Global Action Plan on NCDs. As set out in the draft Terms of Reference (TOR), the UN Interagency Task Force has the potential to contribute to this architecture, by coordinating the activities of the UN agencies and programmes. The first draft TOR contains many of the key elements needed but requires some streamlining and focusing. We propose some improvements to the draft TOR in four main areas:

1. Objectives and key functions

- WCRF International welcomes the stated purpose of the TOR. It encompasses the objectives and key functions, while recognising the need for a broad and diverse composition of agencies and programmes. We are pleased to see explicit reference to including international financial institutions and other inter-governmental organisations.
- However, the way the objectives of the Task Force are described in the TOR is confusing *vis a vis* the key functions and proposed responsibilities. The draft objectives do not fully match

up with the responsibilities described later, nor is there a fit between the objectives and responsibilities described earlier in the text and the suggested areas of work set out in the Table on p9.

- Addressing this lack of clarity will require one set of clear set of *overarching objectives*. These should be positioned upfront and used consistently throughout. We suggest that the Task Force has as its overarching objectives those of the Global NCD Action Plan (as is already proposed in the ‘purpose’).
- These objectives should be accompanied by a set of *cross-cutting key functions* for the Task Force. The key functions should aim to meet the objectives, and be defined on the basis of careful consideration of how the Task Force, as an inter-agency mechanism, can specifically *add value*. That is, how it can contribute to achieving the objectives relative to other processes or mechanisms.
- Specifically, we propose that a streamlined set of key functions be derived from the those already partially identified in paragraph 12 (currently described as the ‘objectives’), paragraphs 30 and 31 (currently described at ‘responsibilities’) and from the suggested areas of work described in the Table on p9. We propose a list of functions in Box 1.

2. Additional key functions

- There are some important areas for coordination that are currently not well articulated in the TOR and should be included in the key functions to avoid major gaps. The current TOR focuses exclusively on how the Task Force can support Member States at the national level; this minimises the potential of the Task Force to leverage change in the UN agencies and programmes themselves, including in their global-level operations. While advocacy is mentioned in the current draft TOR, it is not sufficiently developed as a function, with little information about how advocacy would be carried out and whom it should be targeting. Given the importance of monitoring as part of the WHO’s global architecture on NCDs, there is a surprisingly limited focus on monitoring. Finally, the role of the Task Force in addressing conflict of interest also requires further attention; it is currently described as something agencies should address independently despite the mutual benefit that could arise from agreement across agencies.
- We thus propose four added/clarified functions, namely (see Box 1):
 - *To leverage multi-sector action within the UN system.* The Task Force should encourage multi-sector action on NCDs within the UN system by identifying and communicating mutual value and benefit, and mapping the incentives that are needed to drive participation/buy-in. Such collaborative work by agencies could then be filtered down through guidance and tools provided to Member States.
 - *To strengthen advocacy on NCDs within the UN and with external partners.* We fully support the inclusion of advocacy as a key function, but would encourage the WHO and other UN agencies to consider both *within UN* advocacy (e.g. within and across agencies to ensure NCDs remain/become a priority) and external-facing advocacy to encourage partner organisations to raise NCDs as a priority in their own work.
 - *To facilitate timely exchange of data.* The Task Force should support the cross-agency communication and discussion of data collected by UN agencies and programmes, including but not limited to the findings of the WHO’s Global Monitoring Framework and Global Action Plan monitoring exercises.
 - *To coordinate on issues relating to conflicts of interest.* Given the universal challenge of avoiding possible conflicts of interest as they relate to NCDs, the Task Force should provide a forum for collaboration across agencies on this issue, helping to ensure a common approach.

Box 1: Proposed key functions

1. Facilitate the identification of country-level needs
2. Coordinate support to Member States with the development and implementation of national plans and policies for the prevention and control of NCDs, including on the role of legislation and regulation and multi-sector planning
3. Leverage multi-sector action within the UN system
4. Facilitate timely exchange of information on existing and planned strategies, programmes and activities at the global, regional and national levels
5. Facilitate timely exchange of information on available resources to support national efforts and provide a clearing house across agencies
6. Mobilise resources for the implementation of activities, including joint programmes between UN agencies and programmes and support for innovative financing responses
7. Facilitate timely exchange of relevant data across agencies
8. Strengthen advocacy within the UN and to external partners in order to raise the priority accorded to the prevention and control of NCDs, including integration in international and national development agendas.
9. Coordinate on issues relating to conflicts of interest and provide a forum for collaboration across agencies and programmes

3. Role of secretariat, chair and member agencies/programmes

- We welcome the leading role of the WHO in the Interagency Taskforce. We agree that the WHO should provide the secretariat and oversee reporting requirements to the UN. We also welcome the commitment to two annual meetings each year, and support the recommendation to continue inter-agency work with ad-hoc meetings
- Once the objectives and key functions have been finalised, we would encourage WHO, in its leading role, to develop annual work plans with specific annual actions. These annual actions should be agreed through consultation with participating agencies and programmes.
- The meetings should be chaired by the Assistant Director General for NCDs in order to encourage senior level participation from other UN agencies. Senior-level buy-in will be important in ensuring the wider dissemination of the Task Force's work and continued momentum.
- The WHO should delegate, through consultation with other agencies and programmes, lead responsibility for specific actions as set out in the annual work plan. This will help maintain momentum and secure buy-in. There appears no need to have "convening" or "partner" organisations – it is not clear what this designation means.

4. Division of tasks and responsibilities

- We suggest that table with division of tasks and responsibilities be restructured according to the key functions, as set out in Box 1, with annual actions included (e.g. 2014-2015).

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