

NCD Alliance Response: HABITAT III Issue Paper 13: Jobs and Livelihoods

This response was prepared by the NCD Alliance, a global network of 2,000 civil society organisations in 170 countries working towards a world free of preventable suffering and death from non-communicable diseases (NCDs).

The NCD Alliance commends the drafting of the Issue Papers, and welcomes the opportunity to submit comments on the Issue Paper on Jobs and Livelihoods as part of the Urban Dialogue on Urban Economy. The majority of people with NCDs live in urban settings, and urbanisation is associated with increasing exposure to risk factors for NCDs. As such, urban settings offer great opportunity for implementing effective policies and interventions for the prevention and control of NCDs. NCDs, including cancer, cardiovascular disease, chronic respiratory diseases, diabetes and mental and neurological disorders share common risk factors, including poor nutrition, physical inactivity and tobacco use, which can be addressed through comprehensive workplace interventions.

General Comments:

- The NCD Alliance commends the clear presentation of information and issues in this paper. The paper is comprehensive but makes no mention of health, NCDs, and their associated economic impacts in the context of jobs and the workplace. Investing in a healthy workforce leads to improved wellbeing and increased productivity, with optimal economic returns. Failure to address issues of health and safety in the workplace leads to illness, sick days (absenteeism), and death.

Main Concepts:

- The NCD Alliance recommends broadening the issues mentioned within the definition of “decent work” to include matters relating to a safe and healthy environment.

Figures and Key Facts:

- The NCD Alliance recommends adding statistics from the International Labour Organisation on safety and health at work to this section: An estimated 2.3 million people die every year from work-related accidents and diseases. More than 160 million people suffer from occupational and work-related diseases (equivalent to one worker every 15 seconds), and there are 313 million non-fatal accidents per year. The suffering caused by such accidents and illnesses to workers and their families is incalculable. In economic terms, the ILO has estimated that more than 4% of the world's annual GDP is lost as a consequence of occupational accidents and diseases.ⁱ Work setting causes 1.3million deaths each year from cancer alone, of which one in three is caused by asbestos. The World Health Organization notes that most the exposure risks for occupational cancer are preventable.ⁱⁱ Most of the world's workforce is employed in "vulnerable" conditions, without adequate health and social protection measures – primarily in the informal sector.ⁱⁱⁱ

Issue Summary:

- The third sub-section in the Issue Summary, on “Poor working conditions have a drag on economic growth” should be extended to “Poor working conditions impact health, productivity and economic growth”. The detrimental effect of poor working conditions on health can be mitigated by reducing exposure (and where necessary initially by raising awareness) to carcinogenic substances including asbestos, pesticides and radiation in the workplace, to improve nutrition in contexts where meals are provided, and to encourage employers to encourage and physical activity in the workplace (e.g. by providing cycle racks, cycle share schemes, showers, and even gyms where possible). In the United States, data shows that wellness programs returned over three dollars in health care savings and



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almost three dollars in reduced absenteeism cost for every dollar invested.^{iv} The recommendation for workplaces to introduce smoking bans onsite should also be made.

Key Drivers for Action:

- The World Health Organization has defined core health indicators for sustainable jobs which can monitor progress and identify success. These indicators should be included here to promote monitoring and accountability.^v

ⁱ International Labour Organisation, Safety and Health at Work (online [here](#))

ⁱⁱ World Health Organization, Fact sheet N°350: Environmental and occupational cancers, 2011

ⁱⁱⁱ ILO global employment trends 2012: preventing a deeper jobs crisis. Geneva, International Labour Organization, 2012

^{iv} Baiker K et al, Workplace Wellness Programs Can Generate Savings. Health Affairs, 2010

^v World Health Organization: Health Indicators of sustainable jobs in the Context of the Rio+20 UN Conference on Sustainable Development Initial findings from a WHO Expert Consultation: 17-18 May 2012