

Proceedings of the second Africa regional meeting of the world noncommunicable disease federation

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ABSTRACT

The Second Africa Regional Meeting of the World Noncommunicable Disease (NCD) Federation was held 12–14 January 2023 in Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe, under the theme “NCD prevention, surveillance and management to achieve SDG 3 in the context of COVID-19 and other health emergencies.” Supported by the World NCD Federation (India), WHO Regional Office for Africa, UNICEF Zimbabwe, Clinton Health Access Initiative, and Zimbabwe’s Ministry of Health and Child Care, the meeting convened over 100 participants from seven countries. Plenary sessions and panel discussions covered emerging oral contraceptive-related NCD risks; implementation challenges and successes of the WHO Package of Essential Noncommunicable package across 23 countries; strengths and gaps in NCD surveillance including the need for district-level dashboards; COVID-19’s multifaceted impact on NCD services; telemedicine innovations for remote screening; and health-system financing models including ring-fenced levies. A 3-day dialogue yielded three key recommendations: (1) conduct Zimbabwean studies on oral contraceptive effects in pregnancy; (2) strengthen country-level collection and sharing of disaggregated NCD data; and (3) leverage multisectoral partnerships and ring-fenced “sin taxes” to finance integrated NCD services. This concise proceedings report highlights actionable steps to accelerate Africa’s progress toward SDG 3.4’s one-third reduction in premature NCD mortality by 2030.

Keywords: Conference proceedings, COVID-19, noncommunicable diseases, surveillance, oral contraceptives, Victoria Falls

Background to the Meeting

Noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) now cause the majority of premature adult deaths in low- and middle-income countries.^[1,2] COVID-19 further disrupted NCD services partial to complete clinic closures, workforce redeployment, drug shortages, and absence of integrated surveillance. In this context, the World NCD Federation, WHO Regional Office for Africa, UNICEF Zimbabwe, Clinton Health Access Initiative, and Zimbabwe’s Ministry of Health and Child Care co-hosted the Second Africa Regional Meeting (12–14 January 2023, Victoria Falls) [Figure 1] to identify regional best practices and forge consensus on interventions to mitigate risk, strengthen surveillance, and ensure continuity of NCD care during health emergencies.

Objectives

1. Share country experiences in NCD prevention, management, and surveillance amid COVID-19 and other emergencies
2. Identify operational challenges and opportunities for scaling up the WHO Package of Essential Noncommunicable (PEN) Disease Interventions across African primary-care settings^[3]

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Figure 1: Group photo of participants at the Second Africa Regional Meeting of the World Noncommunicable Diseases Federation, Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe (12–14 January 2023)

3. Formulate evidence-informed, multisectoral recommendations to advance SDG 3.4 (one-third reduction in premature NCD mortality by 2030).

Meeting Proceedings

Day 1: Official opening and thematic overview

- Welcome by Dr N. Kuretu (Provincial Medical Director, Matabeleland North) and Prof JS Thakur (President, World NCD Federation)
- WHO representative underscored the rising African NCD burden and cost-effective “best buys”
- Deputy Minister Dr John Mangwiro officially opened the meeting, noting 95% bed occupancy by NCDs, and detailed Zimbabwe’s PHC integration and HPV vaccination efforts
- Plenaries on epidemiological transition, school-based health promotion, and the interplay of oral contraceptives with obesity, hypertension, diabetes, and cancer risk.

Day 2: Country experiences and technical sessions

- Panel on WHO PEN implementation: 23 countries engaged; successes in Benin and Zimbabwe districts; supply-chain and monitoring and evaluation gaps
- Country case studies (Zimbabwe, Botswana, Lesotho, Zambia, and Eswatini) highlighted telemedicine for remote screening, cohort analysis for hypertension/diabetes, and community-worker capacity building
- Expert talk on integrating NCD screening into vaccination weeks and faith-based settings using portable blood pressure and glucose monitors.

Day 3: Surveillance, financing, and research agenda

- Discussion on social-determinants data: Poverty mapping, spatial analyses, and the need for district-level dashboards
- Panel on innovative financing: Ring-fenced levies on tobacco, alcohol, and sugary products; Thai and Botswana surcharge models; and capitation and results-based financing opportunities
- Breakout groups drafted the “Victoria Falls Call to Action,” culminating in three prioritized recommendations.

Recommendations

1. Oral contraceptive research: Conduct Zimbabwean studies on NCD risks among women using oral contraceptives (lead: Director of NCDs; timeline: December 2023)
2. Data systems strengthening: Enhance collection, disaggregation, and multisectoral sharing of NCD surveillance data (lead: national NCD programs; ongoing)
3. Innovative financing and partnerships: Implement ring-fenced “sin taxes” and engage private-sector and faith-based networks to fund integrated NCD services (lead: health ministries and finance; ongoing).

Ethical approval statement

As this report describes the proceedings of a convened meeting and did not involve primary research with human subjects or individual-level data, formal ethical approval was not required.

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This meeting was funded and technically supported by the World NCD Federation (India), WHO Regional Office for Africa, UNICEF Zimbabwe, Clinton Health Access Initiative, and the Zimbabwe Ministry of Health and Child Care.

Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

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2. United Nations. Political Declaration of the High-Level Meeting of the General Assembly on the Prevention and Control of Non-communicable Diseases. New York: United Nations; 2011.
3. World Health Organization. Package of Essential Noncommunicable Disease Interventions (PEN) for Primary Health Care in Low-resource Settings. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2010.