

NCD Alliance's Civil Society Solidarity Fund on NCDs and COVID-19

ACHIEVEMENTS REPORT

**Supporting NCD civil society
action during COVID-19**

March 2021



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This NCD Alliance report on the Civil Society Solidarity Fund on NCDs and COVID-19 is based on the efforts of the 20 NCD alliances that were recipients of the fund in 2020. Thank you to all the alliance representatives who responded to the online evaluation and shared information for the activity cases showcased in this report. We thank the Solidarity Fund Selection Committee members whose support allowed the final selection of the fund recipients: Dr Svetlana Akselrod, Director of the Global Coordination Mechanism on NCDs at the WHO; Diana Vaca McGhie, Director of Global Advocacy at the American Heart Association; Cajsa Lindberg, advocate living with NCDs and member of the Our Views, Our Voices Advisory Committee; and Dr Hoseah Waweru, President of the International Federation of Psoriasis Associations.

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The NCD Alliance's Civil Society Solidarity Fund on NCDs and COVID-19 has been made possible thanks to the generous financial contributions of NCD Alliance's supporters: Access Accelerated, AstraZeneca, The Leona M. and Harry B. Helmsley Charitable Trust, Takeda and Upjohn Pfizer (now Viatris).

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Published by the NCD Alliance

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Executive summary

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought numerous challenges to our society, especially for those living with noncommunicable diseases¹ (NCDs), who are particularly vulnerable to becoming severely ill and dying from the virus. It has exposed deeply rooted social and economic inequalities and has highlighted the urgent need for investment in NCD prevention and control for the benefit of healthy populations and resilient health systems.

Hence, the role of NCD civil society in raising awareness, ensuring access, promoting accountability and advocating for change has become more crucial than ever. Civil society organisations, affected communities and community-led efforts play a critical role in accelerating action from local to global levels, calling for change and building political momentum. Nevertheless, this rise in demand comes at a time when national and regional NCD alliances are faced with operational and financial challenges due to COVID-19.

In response to these challenging times, the NCD Alliance (NCDA) has leveraged its programmes and partnerships to launch in July 2020 the first-of-its-kind Civil Society Solidarity Fund on NCDs and COVID-19. Through three categories, the Solidarity Fund aims to support the organisational sustainability and resilience of national and regional NCD alliances, ensure a strong and unified NCD civil society response to COVID-19, support advocacy and communications efforts to raise the voices of people living with NCDs, and shape the pandemic's legacy for building back better and fairer. The Solidarity Fund, totalling US\$300,000, supported 20 competitively selected national and regional NCD alliances from all WHO regions, with half of them being from low-income and lower middle-income countries. The Solidarity Fund was possible thanks to the generous financial contributions of NCDA's supporters: Access Accelerated, AstraZeneca, The Leona M. and Harry B. Helmsley Charitable Trust, Takeda and Upjohn Pfizer (now Viartis).



The mini-documentary [The hidden pandemic: How COVID-19 impacts people with NCDs in Cambodia](#) was created by the Cambodian NCD Alliance with support from the Solidarity Fund.

¹ The main noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) include cardiovascular diseases, cancers, chronic respiratory diseases, diabetes and mental health conditions.

Overall achievements of the Solidarity Fund

With the support of the Solidarity Fund, alliances were able to step up their advocacy and communications efforts to promote the needs of people living with NCDs within government plans and policy measures to respond to COVID-19, contributing to “building back better” as a legacy of the pandemic. The South-East Asia Regional NCD Alliance raised awareness of the linkages between COVID-19 and NCDs in a statement delivered at the WHO Regional Committee Meeting for South-East Asia in September 2020. Eight other alliances effectively advocated for integrating NCDs into governments’ COVID-19 responses, such as the Healthy Philippines Alliance advocating for the inclusion of NCDs in its government’s Inter-Agency Task Force on COVID-19 planning efforts, and the East Africa NCD Alliance supporting the Ministry of Health in Uganda to develop guidelines and standard operating procedures for NCD management during the pandemic. In an effort to contribute to building back better during and beyond COVID-19, the Healthy Caribbean Coalition launched a new regional long-term strategy to make the case for integrating NCD action into broader health agendas, including health security and pandemic preparedness.

The initiative supported alliances to involve and support people living with NCDs, having their views considered and their voices heard in diverse civil society activities. More than 700 people living with NCDs were engaged through consultations, trainings and project development efforts by NCD alliances in Benin, Burundi, Nigeria and Togo. Moreover, communication campaigns, including with media, raised awareness on NCDs and the needs of people living with NCDs with calls for increased political action during the pandemic. More than 100 media stories were published with support from the Solidarity Fund, with one main contributor being the East Africa NCD Alliance, which in collaboration with its member alliances in Rwanda, Kenya, Burundi, Uganda, Tanzania and Zanzibar, trained 140 journalists building a regional journalist network to increase public awareness of NCDs. Additionally, alliances in Benin and Cambodia produced mini-films highlighting how the virus affects people living with NCDs calling for strategic prioritisation of their needs in the pandemic response.

Overall, the Solidarity Fund successfully promoted a coordinated and unified NCD civil society response to COVID-19 and ensured progress towards more sustainable and resilient alliances to effectively adapt and navigate the COVID-19 landscape. For example, NCD alliances in Uruguay and Zambia achieved this by building up their organisational and communication infrastructures and increasing collaboration with members, and the alliance in Slovenia did it through a new strategic plan considering the intersections of COVID-19 and NCDs. The Healthy Latin America Coalition also expanded civil society efforts across Latin America by launching the new regional “Americas Saludable 2030” network (*Healthy Americas 2030*) for civil society and decision makers to collaborate on achieving the SDGs.

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues, there is an imperative to build resilience, with stronger health systems and healthy populations better equipped to face future crises. There is a need for continued support of NCD civil society as it will be essential to accelerate the much needed and long overdue action on NCD prevention and control.

THE INITIATIVE

20 competitively selected national and regional **NCD ALLIANCES**

+700 PEOPLE LIVING WITH NCDs

+100 MEDIA STORIES PUBLISHED

140 JOURNALISTS TRAINED



SECTION I

NCD Alliance's Civil Society Solidarity Fund on NCDs and COVID-19

Noncommunicable diseases and COVID-19

Noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) and COVID-19 represent two overlapping pandemics negatively impacting the sustainability of health systems and economies of all countries in every region, and causing great harm to all communities and families. Evidence shows that people living with NCDs (PLWNCDs) are at substantially higher risk of becoming severely ill or dying from COVID-19 infection and therefore are particularly vulnerable during this pandemic². Hence, the NCD community has experienced COVID-19 as a syndemic, being severely and disproportionately impacted in terms of numbers of deaths, disruptions in their NCD services, and the extreme anxiety imposed by the pandemic on PLWNCDs. It is thus clear how both COVID-19 and NCDs aggravate one another against a background of social and economic disparity, disproportionately impacting the poorest and most disadvantaged³.

Almost one year after COVID-19 was declared a pandemic by the World Health Organization (WHO), all countries, irrespective of their income level, have seen their health services disrupted, particularly those for the prevention and treatment of NCDs. 122 countries reported disruptions in NCD services, with over 50% of their hypertension management services, 50% of their diabetes services and 40% of their cancer treatments being partially or completely disrupted due to COVID-19. This is likely to lead to a long-term upsurge in deaths from NCDs, according to the WHO's rapid assessment of service delivery for NCDs during the COVID-19 pandemic⁴.

Given the intersections between NCDs and COVID-19, there is a need to advocate for the integration of NCDs within COVID-19 national preparedness and response plans, including the views, perspectives and lived experience of those living with or affected by NCDs. The response to the COVID-19 pandemic at the national, regional and global levels must aim to build back better and fairer, addressing the healthcare needs of PLWNCDs, and ensuring healthy populations and strong health systems.

“Two categories of disease are interacting within specific populations—infection with severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) and an array of non-communicable diseases (NCDs). [...] COVID-19 is not a pandemic. It is a syndemic. The syndemic nature of the threat we face means that a more nuanced approach is needed if we are to protect the health of our communities.”

Richard Horton, *The Lancet*, September 2020

² NCD Alliance (June 2020). Briefing Note - Impacts of COVID-19 on people living with NCDs. Available at: https://ncdalliance.org/sites/default/files/resource_files/COVID-19_%26_NCDs_BriefingNote_27April_FinalVersion_0.pdf

³ Op cit 2

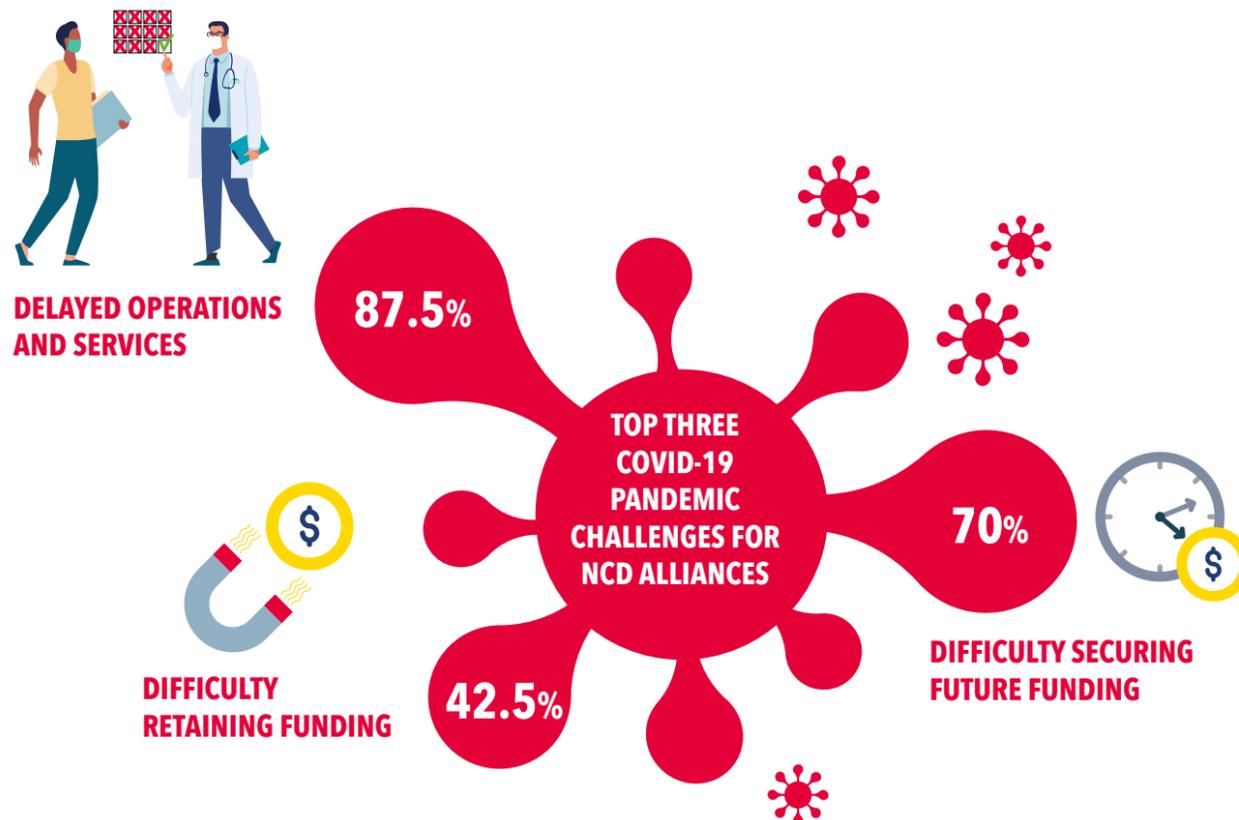
⁴ WHO (May 2020). Rapid assessment of service delivery for NCDs during the COVID-19 pandemic. Available at: <https://www.who.int/publications/m/item/rapid-assessment-of-service-delivery-for-ncds-during-the-covid-19-pandemic>



Challenges for NCD civil society during the pandemic

COVID-19 has had a major impact on civil society organisations worldwide, creating significant financial and operational challenges for the sector, due to social distancing and lockdown measures put in place to combat the virus. Civil society organisations (CSOs) have had to adapt how they deliver on their mission and provide services to the communities they serve, shifting to virtual ways of working. And these adaptations are being made during a period of heightened demand for services due to the impact the pandemic is having on families and communities.

In May 2020, NCDA conducted a short survey to better understand current needs and challenges of NCD civil society. The global network of national and regional NCD alliances identified that the top three challenges that countries and regions were expected to face throughout the COVID-19 pandemic were: increased vulnerability of PLWNCs (92.5%); disruption of treatment and care for them (87.5%); and travel restrictions and social distancing measures challenging people living healthy lives (e.g., lack of access to healthy food, lack of physical activity, increased alcohol and tobacco use) (87.5%). The survey also identified that the three most important challenges that NCD alliances expected to face were delayed operations and services (87.5%); difficulty securing future funding (70%); and difficulty retaining funding (42.5%). Such challenges were evidenced in 2020, with NCD civil society needing more, better and direct capacity and coalition building; and advocacy support to position NCDs in the COVID-19 political and health agendas, as well as to ensure their organisational sustainability.



NCD Alliance response The Civil Society Solidarity Fund on NCDs and COVID-19

National and regional NCD alliances have been playing and will continue to play an important role during COVID-19 and also in shaping its legacy with an aim of building back better and fairer. The work of NCD advocates has never been more critical, and it is key to ensure high-level political and media attention is given to the needs of PLWNCs as one of the groups that is most vulnerable to the virus.

It has become more essential than ever to ensure a vibrant and strong NCD civil society that can elevate the voices of communities and NCDs, advocate for health policy reform, and hold governments and other stakeholders to account. The global NCD civil society movement has seen very significant growth over the last decade; however, COVID-19 has challenged and is still challenging its sustainability, demanding advocacy efforts on the ground to adapt to the limitations of the current context. If we are to avoid people being left behind, a strong civil society movement is essential. It is therefore crucial to support NCD advocates to ensure they can continue their essential work.

With that understanding, NCDA launched in July 2020 the Civil Society Solidarity Fund on NCDs and COVID-19 (hereinafter the Solidarity Fund), which supported 20 national and regional NCD alliances in Africa, Asia, Europe, Eastern Mediterranean, Latin America and the Caribbean to accelerate the response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Solidarity Fund, totalling US\$300,000, competitively awarded grants of up to US\$15,000 to member national and regional NCD alliances in support of activities conducted during the period of July to December 2020.

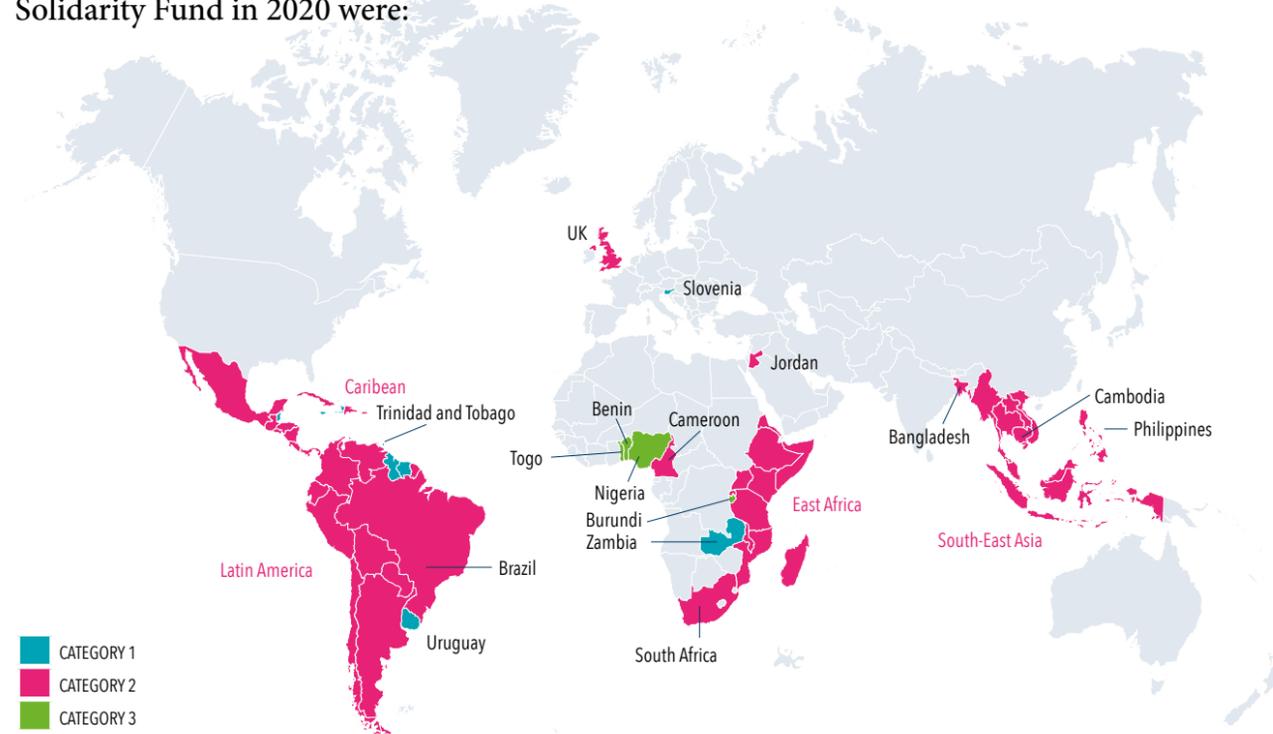
Through the Solidarity Fund, NCDA supported NCD alliances to strengthen their advocacy and communications strategies and overcome some of the challenges imposed by the current COVID-19 pandemic to health systems, Universal Health Coverage (UHC) and NCD prevention globally. The Solidarity Fund aimed to:

- **Ensure organisational sustainability** and resilience of national and regional NCD alliances to effectively adapt and navigate the COVID-19 landscape.
- **Promote a coordinated and unified NCD civil society response** to COVID-19 in the emergency and aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- **Protect, involve and support PLWNCs**, including vulnerable groups like women, youth, and the elderly, ensuring their views and voices are heard in advocacy and communications on COVID-19.
- **Support advocacy and communications efforts** to promote the needs of PLWNCs during COVID-19 and shape the legacy of “building back better” with greater investments in public health and health systems.

The Solidarity Fund's Call for Proposals received 45 submissions from 32 national and regional NCD alliances across all regions, which were competitively reviewed by a Selection Committee of NCD experts according to predefined selection criteria. Selection Committee members included: Dr Svetlana Akselrod, Director of the Global Coordination Mechanism on NCDs at WHO; Diana Vaca McGhie, Director of Global Advocacy at the American Heart Association; Cajsa Lindberg, advocate living with NCDs and member of the Our Views, Our Voices Advisory Committee; and Dr Hoseah Waweru, President of the International Federation of Psoriasis Associations.

Meet the 20 Solidarity Fund recipients

The 20 national and regional NCD alliances supported by the Solidarity Fund in 2020 were:



CATEGORY 1

Strengthening of NCD alliances' infrastructure, governance and sustainability in light of COVID-19

Awarded to each alliance **US\$ 5,000**

Alianza ENT Uruguay (NCD Alliance Uruguay)

GRANT FOCUS

Improve external and internal communication platforms, to ensure greater coordination of its actions and operation.

Slovenian NCD Alliance

GRANT FOCUS

Consolidate its structure through stronger communication platforms, allowing more visibility and partnerships; create a multi-year strategic plan taking into account the effects of COVID-19 on NCD-related issues.

Zambia Non-Communicable Diseases Alliance

GRANT FOCUS

Coordinate communication strategies to improve its governance and coordination; promote policy engagement for an NCD-inclusive government response to COVID-19; formulate a strategic plan for the current and future response in pandemic contexts.

CATEGORY 2

Developing a comprehensive and cohesive NCD advocacy and communications strategy for the COVID-19 response

Awarded to each alliance **US\$ 15,000**

ACT Promoção da Saúde (ACT Health Promotion - Brazil)

GRANT FOCUS

In collaboration with local authorities in the State of San Paulo, create an online course to enable the adoption of regulatory and legislative NCD prevention measures and contribute to a healthier and more sustainable environment in the country.

Bangladesh Non-Communicable Diseases Forum

GRANT FOCUS

Engage stakeholders in the prioritisation of NCD treatment and clinical management in the context of the government's response to COVID-19; promote knowledge of NCD management services among PLWNCDs at the community level.

Cambodian NCD Alliance

GRANT FOCUS

Roll out advocacy and communications campaigns based on the lived experience of PLWNCDs amid the pandemic; mobilise key influencers to promote the inclusion of NCDs in public health preparedness and health system strengthening.

Cameroon Civil Society NCD Alliance

GRANT FOCUS

Assess NCD services and advocate for inclusion of NCDs in the national response plan for COVID-19 within the context of UHC; adopt an advocacy and communications campaign on the links between NCDs and COVID-19, particularly among PLWNCDs.

Coalición Latinoamérica Saludable (Healthy Latin American Coalition)

GRANT FOCUS

Promote and monitor accountability in governments' response to COVID-19 and NCDs in Latin America, while raising public awareness and mobilising national member alliances.

East Africa NCD Alliance

GRANT FOCUS

Build media capacity in East Africa and develop a communications strategy to enable stakeholder engagement and coalition-building for integrated advocacy on NCDs, COVID-19 and other infectious diseases.

Healthy Caribbean Coalition

GRANT FOCUS

Increase public awareness and policymaker understanding of NCDs to build public and political demand to prioritise the agendas of NCDs and building back better during and beyond COVID-19.

Healthy Philippines Alliance

GRANT FOCUS

Make the case for integration of NCDs in the government's COVID-19 preparedness and response plan, by investing in high-level and grassroots advocacy.

Jordan NCD Alliance

GRANT FOCUS

Advocate for the inclusion of NCDs in national COVID-19 preparedness plans and government efforts to maintain essential health services; promote the rights of PLWNCDs and the inclusion of NCD civil society in decision-making processes.

South African NCD Alliance

GRANT FOCUS

Develop a comprehensive and cohesive NCD advocacy and communications strategy considering PLWNCDs, COVID-19 and UHC, in order to obtain high-level support and enable civil society participation in the government's National Strategic Plan for NCDs.

South-East Asia Regional NCD Alliance

GRANT FOCUS

Analyse country-level preparedness for UHC in the region, identifying replicable models and solutions based on the intersections between NCDs and COVID-19 and building on advocacy and communications opportunities, at both regional and national levels.

Trinidad and Tobago NCD Alliance

GRANT FOCUS

Support PLWNCDs and develop a shared advocacy strategy for prevention and control of NCDs and their risk factors during the COVID-19 pandemic.

UK Working Group on NCDs

GRANT FOCUS

Develop a comprehensive advocacy and communications strategy on NCDs in health and development in light of COVID-19 to support engagement with the government, focusing on international response and engagement with other NCD alliances.

CATEGORY 3

Supporting people living with NCDs and amplifying their voices in the COVID-19 pandemic

Awarded to each alliance **US\$ 10,000**

Alliance MNT Benin (NCD Alliance Benin)

GRANT FOCUS

Assess the state of activities carried out by PLWNCDs and civil society during the pandemic; provide online support to PLWNCDs and advocate with authorities for the protection of the right to health for PLWNCDs in the country.

Burundi NCD Alliance

GRANT FOCUS

Improve the understanding of the implications of COVID-19 in the diagnosis, treatment and lives of PLWNCDs; build capacity among frontline health workers, PLWNCDs and vulnerable groups on topics including prevention, referrals and de-stigmatisation.

Coalition MNT-Togo (NCD Alliance Togo)

GRANT FOCUS

Coordinate civil society organisations to develop and adopt awareness raising actions to reduce the risk of COVID-19 among PLWNCDs, advocating to amplify their voices and raise government awareness about their situation amid the pandemic.

NCD Alliance Nigeria

GRANT FOCUS

Identify, engage and involve PLWNCDs with skills and information, through coordination and capacity building opportunities to improve their access to NCD prevention, treatment and care.

SECTION II

The Civil Society Solidarity Fund on NCDs and COVID-19: achievements

NCDA's Civil Society Solidarity Fund on NCDs and COVID-19 in 2020 proved to be effective in supporting the 20 recipient NCD alliances to strengthen their structures, advocacy and communications efforts during COVID-19, as well as to increase their understanding and dissemination of the needs of PLWNCDs in light of the pandemic. To help assess its achievements, NCDA documented key activities, and conducted an evaluation of the initiative's objectives based on survey responses collected from the 20 recipient alliances in January 2021. A summary of the key results is presented in this section.

Solidarity Fund achievements by each of the three categories

CATEGORY 1

Strengthening of NCD alliances' infrastructure, governance and sustainability in light of COVID-19

Through this category, the Solidarity Fund supported alliances to implement strategic projects to develop their coalition building efforts in light of COVID-19 restrictions and impact, through adapting their current plans and operations to ensure sustainability and resilience, and improving visibility during a time when alliances' mandates are more important than ever.

All three national NCD alliances who received a grant under Category 1 (Slovenia, Uruguay and Zambia) indicated that the Solidarity Fund helped them strengthen their function and governance.

"With the help of the Solidarity Fund, we have kickstarted our alliance in Slovenia and made the starting infrastructure possible to grow from now on. After the project we see the Slovenian NCD Alliance as a strong driver for future connections and joint work."

The Slovenian NCDA

The three alliances were also unanimous in affirming that the Solidarity Fund has increased their position as key stakeholders on NCD advocacy in their countries/regions. *"The grant helped to improve and renew our alliance's institutional image, and provided tools and structure to improve its work and increase its advocacy,"* said the NCD Alliance Uruguay.



Example of a media appearance of the NCD Alliance Uruguay using their newly developed logo, which has reinforced the alliance's public appearances, such as in TV broadcasts.

Additionally, the Solidarity Fund has enabled the three alliances to adopt initiatives to increase collaboration among members, while also allowing engagement with important NCD stakeholders and welcoming new organisations as members during the grant period. For the Slovenian NCD Alliance, the grant has helped to bring closer the country's most important civil society players on the field of NCDs – the five biggest health networks in Slovenia. "After the project, the Slovenian NCD Alliance is perceived as a strong driver for future connections and joint work," said the alliance.

Zambia NCD Alliance recognised by its Ministry of Health and WHO country office

Supported by the Solidarity Fund, the Zambia NCD Alliance (ZANOCODA) has increased its position as a key stakeholder on NCD advocacy on multiple fronts. The alliance re-engaged with the Ministry of Health as a strategic partner, with its members participating in the formulation of the National NCD Strategic Plan, and by sitting on the Country Coordinating Mechanism for Tobacco Control and NCDs. ZANOCODA participated in an African Heart Network webinar, contributing to its regional and international recognition, strengthened by the WHO country office who welcomed the alliance and acknowledged the importance of its work.

On 26 November 2020, the Healthy Philippines Alliance organised a virtual meeting with the Office of Senator Christopher Go, Chair of the Senate Health Committee, to present its key recommendations on prevention and control of NCDs amid the COVID-19 pandemic.



CATEGORY 2 Developing a comprehensive and cohesive NCD advocacy and communications strategy for the COVID-19 response

13 national and regional NCD alliances received a Solidarity Fund grant with the aim of helping them develop comprehensive and cohesive advocacy and communications strategies tailored to national/regional needs, and framed around a compelling and sensitive narrative on the intersections between NCDs and COVID-19.

The majority of alliances supported through Category 2 (11 out of 13) either strongly agree or agree that the Solidarity Fund enabled them to carry out successful advocacy and communications campaigns on NCDs and COVID-19. All 13 alliances have developed at least one type of advocacy document, such as statements, policy briefings or technical papers. An important example is the statement submitted by the South-East Asia Regional NCD Alliance in the context of the WHO SEAR Regional Committee Meeting in September 2020, highlighting the issues faced by PLWNCDs during the pandemic and calling for the prioritisation of NCD prevention and control within COVID-19 regional and national preparedness, as well as UHC.

Another example of a key advocacy effort was the Healthy Philippines Alliance and its position paper covering the challenges faced by PLWNCDs during the COVID-19 pandemic, including recommendations to improve the pandemic response to make it more inclusive for them. The position paper resulted from a series of consultations and was submitted to the

government's Inter-Agency Task Force on COVID-19, the Department of Health and other concerned government agencies and lawmakers. It was also presented to a prominent Filipino politician who is the Chair of the Senate Committee on Health and Demography, Senator Christopher Go.

Through Category 2, the Solidarity Fund also aimed to influence a robust policy response and legacy to the pandemic, with the broader goals of health system strengthening and UHC, fostering investments in public health and prevention, and safeguarding the rights of PLWNCDs. Thanks to the Solidarity Fund, 62% of alliances in this category indicated that their governments have included or demonstrated willingness to include NCDs in their COVID-19 response plans and agendas. More than half of the alliances in this category (eight in total) reported being invited to engage in their countries' national COVID-19 response plans, promoting civil society perspectives and needs. The East Africa NCD Alliance, for example, was successful in joining the Ministry of Health in Uganda and other partners to develop guidelines and standard operating procedures for management of NCDs during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Those alliances who did not take part directly in their country's COVID-19 plans and decision making still implemented plans to advocate for policy change and increase awareness on the need to integrate NCDs into COVID-19 plans. Although some alliances participated in their government's COVID-19 response planning

promoting NCDs and the needs of PLWNCDs, there is still great need for civil society to continue advocating for increased political will and commitments to ensure NCDs are effectively included in COVID-19 plans, and to ensure government commitment to meaningfully involve civil society in NCD and broader health decision making. This makes clear the need to continue supporting NCD civil society during pandemics like COVID-19, to ensure NCDs are addressed and integrated into broader health decision making processes, and to guarantee a seat at the table.

The Solidarity Fund also supported alliances in their efforts to engage with the media, with the aim to maximise public awareness and promote bolder policy interventions by authorities. The majority of alliances in Category 2 (62%) published media stories as a result of their advocacy and communications efforts on NCDs and COVID-19. **More than 100 media stories were published across the three categories of the Solidarity Fund**, with information being disseminated through television and radio broadcasts, printed media and online news outlets. Topics ranged from the launch and reception of a Solidarity Fund grant, to calls to action demanding the highest level of political action on NCDs during the pandemic.

In November 2020, the Cameroon Civil Society NCD Alliance organised a press conference for the launch of the report: The State and Role of NCD Services during the COVID-19 Pandemic.



East Africa NCD Alliance trained 140 journalists on the links between COVID-19 and NCDs

The East Africa NCD Alliance (EANCDA) conducted a media training on the convergence between NCDs and COVID-19 and other infectious diseases in partnership with its national member alliances, building capacity of a total of 140 journalists in Rwanda, Kenya, Burundi, Uganda, Tanzania and Zanzibar. As a follow-up to the workshop, the EANCDA also created a network of journalists in the region to enhance dissemination of information on NCDs and infectious diseases, including COVID-19. The initiative is increasing opportunities for collaborative advocacy across the East African region, and as a result, a total of 38 media stories have been published since October 2020.



On 21 October 2020, the EANCDA, in collaboration with its member alliance the Rwanda NCD Alliance, conducted one of the six regional media trainings for 26 journalists (14 joining virtually). The collaboration has resulted in the publication of a total of 38 media stories, such as the one above.

The creation of advocacy products that exchange knowledge about NCDs and raise awareness on the many challenges faced by PLWNCDs during COVID-19 has been a central aspect of many projects supported. With the support of the Solidarity Fund Category 2, 12 alliances produced at least one kind of audiovisual communications product. A mini-film produced by the Cambodian NCD Alliance, launched on the sidelines of World Diabetes Day in November 2020, powerfully highlighted the intersections of COVID-19 and NCDs from the experiences of three PLWNCDs, making use

of an efficient communications tool to amplify the intersections of NCDs and COVID-19 and promote the inclusion of NCDs in Cambodia's COVID-19 response.

The COVID-19 pandemic has also led to a substantial change in the way events are held. With restrictions on gatherings and social distancing norms, face-to-face events became much harder to carry out and virtual events became the new normal. As a crucial step to maintaining and developing stakeholder relations, ensuring a smooth transition to digital environments



The Cambodian NCD Alliance produced a **mini-documentary** highlighting the impacts of COVID-19 on people living with NCDs in the country.

and fostering creativity and innovation in virtual events was a priority for grants awarded under Category 2. All alliances in this category delivered at least one virtual event with the support of the Solidarity Fund, including webinars, online forums and report launches. This ensured that they continued engaging with important NCD stakeholders; for example, 11 alliances reported having engaged with influencers and experts as part of their projects.



Healthy Latin American Coalition launched a new regional network for civil society and decision makers collaboration

With the support of the Solidarity Fund, the Healthy Latin American Coalition (CLAS) alongside Chilean Senator and globally known NCD advocate Guido Girardi, and in collaboration with The Union against Tuberculosis and Respiratory Diseases, created the innovative "América Saludable 2030" (Healthy Americas 2030), an initiative bringing together political allies, academics and civil society to advance towards fulfilling the Sustainable Development Goals in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond. As a result of this initiative, this group is facilitating dialogue among previously unconnected sectors in the region. "CLAS has been recognized previously for its regional work in advocacy and for responding quickly to support policy change in countries of the region. It has been engaged with academics and civil society members for some time. This project, however, has taken CLAS' connection to political allies in the region significantly further," emphasised the alliance.



Examples of virtual events held by alliances in the Philippines and UK with the support of the Solidarity Fund



CLAS event invitation supported by the Solidarity Fund: "How to build a healthier future? - Healthy Americas 2030"

CATEGORY 3

Supporting people living with NCDs and amplifying their voices in the COVID-19 pandemic

With support of the Solidarity Fund Category 3, national NCD alliances in Benin, Burundi, Nigeria and Togo, carried out efforts to meaningfully involve PLWNCDs, by collecting and disseminating their views and voices during the pandemic. Such efforts sought to map, understand and address their needs and challenges, amplifying their voices in advocacy and communications on COVID-19 with a view to protect their right to health and call for uninterrupted access to quality treatment and care.

More than 700 PLWNCDs were involved by the four alliances under this category in the different stages of their projects, from planning and design to monitoring and evaluation. In addition to this, these four alliances also engaged PLWNCDs in their advocacy efforts, putting them at the centre of messages sent out to the public and decision makers. NCD Alliance Benin, for example, not only produced a video where PLWNCDs voiced their stories and concerns, but was also able to engage with 16 patient organisations active in the country throughout the project.

As part of their Solidarity Fund initiatives, these four alliances also sought to understand and address the needs and challenges of PLWNCDs during COVID-19, with all of them indicating having consulted with and reached out to PLWNCDs through mappings and surveys. Burundi NCD Alliance surveyed 152 PLWNCDs to find out about the implications of COVID-19 on NCD prevention, treatment and stigma. “They found an opportunity to voice their concern in the area of prevention and in management of NCDs and COVID-19 (...), and now they know that there is a body that advocates for them and for their well-being,” the alliance said.

After reaching out to PLWNCDs and understanding their needs in such challenging times, all four alliances in Category 4 produced reports and similar documents discussing the impact of COVID-19 on PLWNCDs. For example, Coalition MNT-Togo produced an advocacy document entitled ‘Advocacy document of people living with NCDs in Togo to the Members of Parliament and decision-makers’ (developed in French), which was shared with parliamentarians and the country’s Ministry of Health. This advocacy document identifies

the needs and concerns of PLWNCDs, while presenting recommendations to reduce the financial burden of NCDs for those living with them.

Supported by the Solidarity Fund, NCD Alliance Nigeria identified, trained and provided external engagement opportunities for eight PLWNCDs to create awareness about NCDs in the country. The champions will engage with actors such as parliamentarians, commissioners of health and WHO, and according to the alliance, “[they] have many roles to play in the struggle to reduce risks of NCDs and crises being faced by PLWNCDs.” During the launch of the activity in Lagos⁵, one trained advocate living with NCDs from the Bauchi State said: “NCDs have no respect for age, place or status; and affect old, young, rich, and poor in villages and cities, the privileged, the vulnerable and recently those affected by COVID-19. We are Nigerians living with NCDs and our voices must be heard.”



Promotional image by NCD Alliance Benin on the report and mini-documentary produced with the support of the Solidarity Fund.



NCD Alliance Nigeria fostered action led by PLWNCDs by providing training and advocacy opportunities to champions across four states in the country.

Overall achievements of the Solidarity Fund

Thanks to the Solidarity Fund, the 20 recipient NCD alliances are more sustainable and resilient, helping them to effectively adapt and navigate the COVID-19 landscape.

National and regional NCD alliances have played and will continue playing an important role during COVID-19 and also in shaping its legacy, with the aim of building back better and fairer. Amid all the challenges resulting from the pandemic, ensuring organisational sustainability and preparedness to face uncertainty is essential for enabling NCD alliances to adapt to the new normal.

All Solidarity Fund NCD alliances indicated that the initiative allowed them to strengthen their organisational sustainability and resilience to effectively adapt and navigate the COVID-19 landscape, which in turn allowed NCDA to fulfil one of the main objectives of this initiative. Additionally, 45% strongly agree that even after the end of the fund grant, their alliances will be able to continue with the efforts supported, which speaks to the promotion of their projects’ sustainability.

“[The Solidarity Fund] strengthened the structure of our alliance, allowing us to better our advocacy efforts despite COVID-19, and ensured more visibility of our work in society. It has also enabled communication with external organisations and enhanced internal communications with alliance members.”

NCD Alliance Uruguay

Solidarity Fund recipients promoting capacity building

NCD alliances in Burundi, Brazil, East Africa, Nigeria and Zambia carried out activities focused on building capacity of key NCD stakeholders, mostly of civil society, decision makers and PLWNCDs, but also journalists and health workers. This contributes to the longer-term legacy of efforts supported by the Solidarity Fund. They have done this through knowledge transfer activities, such as workshops and trainings, focused on the linkages between NCDs and COVID-19 to help improve policy, practice and awareness-raising during the pandemic.

⁵ More information about NCD Alliance Nigeria’s event can be found here: <https://suprememagazine.org/ncd-alliance-unveils-8-lead-champions-in-nigeria-demands-attention-for-plwncds/>

The Solidarity Fund has enabled a coordinated and unified NCD civil society response to COVID-19 in both the emergency and continuity of the pandemic.

With COVID-19 requiring governments to adopt social distancing measures and lockdowns, and with the aim of supporting coalition building efforts, it was and still is essential to support alliances in adapting their operations and leveraging virtual platforms for coordination and collaboration with civil society and other relevant stakeholders. In this context, the majority of alliances (85%) indicated that the Solidarity Fund supported them in building a coordinated and unified NCD civil society response to COVID-19 in the emergency and aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic in their country and/or region.

“The SANCUDA was at a critical advocacy point when the COVID-19 pandemic struck. [With the support of the Solidarity Fund] we built new partnerships and led the civil society NCDs response to become the national leader and co-produce solutions.”

South African NCDs Alliance

Thanks to the Solidarity Fund, NCD alliances have ensured PLWNCDs are involved and supported in civil society efforts – having their views considered and their voices heard during COVID-19.

PLWNCDs are amongst the groups most at risk from COVID-19, not only because of their increased vulnerability to the virus, but also due to the long-term effects the pandemic will have in NCD treatment and care as a consequence of the unprecedented overstretching of health services.

All NCD alliances indicated that the Solidarity Fund enabled their alliances to enhance efforts to protect, involve and support PLWNCDs, including vulnerable groups such as women, youth and the elderly. This has ensured that their views and voices were heard in civil society advocacy and communications on COVID-19. The majority of alliances aimed to meaningfully involve and reach out to PLWNCDs, particularly the four alliances who received a Category 4 Solidarity Fund grant in Togo, Nigeria, Burundi and Benin.

Additionally, 19 alliances mentioned that the Solidarity Fund enabled them to enhance their advocacy and communications efforts to promote NCDs and the needs of PLWNCDs during COVID-19 in their country/region. This is particularly relevant, as the Solidarity Fund aimed at supporting NCD civil society efforts to address the specific needs of PLWNCDs.

PLWNCDs at the centre of advocacy and communications

Across different Solidarity Fund categories, alliances have ensured that PLWNCDs were put at the centre of their advocacy and communications. For example, the Cambodian NCD Alliance created a mini-film, in English, to highlight the first-hand experiences of three people living with NCDs during COVID-19 and shared it through the alliance's social media and website. The Alliance MNT Benin also produced a mini-documentary, in French, which was disseminated on national television and digital broadcasting platforms, amplifying the voices of PLWNCDs.



An advocate and person living with NCDs in the mini-documentary produced by NCD Alliance Benin, with the support of the Solidarity Fund

Advocacy and communications efforts highlighted the intersections of NCDs and COVID-19, shaping the legacy for “building back better”.

Studies suggest that the COVID-19 pandemic is likely to have a long-term impact on several aspects of our society, exacerbating inequalities and affecting economies, political stability and health systems – especially in developing and low- and middle-income countries⁶.

The vast majority of alliances (90%) strongly agreed or agreed that the Solidarity Fund allowed them to enhance their advocacy and communications efforts during the pandemic, thus contributing to “building back better” as a legacy of the COVID-19 pandemic in their country/region. By supporting the development of strategic advocacy campaigns, the Solidarity Fund has allowed alliances to advance towards future policy wins that could lead to greater recognition of the urgency to include NCDs and the needs of PLWNCDs in current and future pandemic preparedness plans, as well as the need for greater investments in public health and health systems.



Promoting the build back better agenda

Through the Solidarity Fund, the Healthy Caribbean Coalition developed and launched a regional long-term strategy making the case for a transformative new approach to NCD prevention and control, and calling for the integration of NCDs into broader health agendas like health security and pandemic preparedness, to contribute to building back better during and beyond COVID-19. The strategy's report 'NCDs and COVID-19 in the Caribbean: A Call to Action – The Case for a Transformative New NCD Agenda and Accompanying Action Plan' was developed with the support and endorsement of key regional stakeholders, including public health institutions, academia, private sector, youth, civil society and PLWNCDs. The report was launched through a digital campaign targeting regional decision makers and an online event on 22 January 2021 with over 300 participants and featuring keynote speakers from regional agencies, government, youth and PLWNCDs – signalling the diverse support for this new agenda and its implementation. Key speakers included Sir George Alleyne, Director Emeritus, Pan American Health Organization (PAHO); Hon. Dr. Christopher Tufton, Minister of Health and Wellness, Jamaica; Dr Joy St. John, Executive Director, Caribbean Public Health Agency (CARPHA); Dr Anselm Hennis, Director, Department of NCDs and Mental Health, PAHO.

◀ Materials promoting The Case for a Transformative New NCD Agenda, developed by the Healthy Caribbean Coalition (HCC); Below: Example from HCC's social media campaign “Now more than ever #ProtectPeopleWithNCDs” launched on the margins of the 32nd Inter-sessional Conference of the Heads of Government of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) held in February 2021

6 World Bank, January 2021. Available at: <https://blogs.worldbank.org/voices/what-covid-19-can-mean-long-term-inequality-developing-countries>

SECTION III

Conclusions and lessons learnt from the Civil Society Solidarity Fund on NCDs and COVID-19

Impetus for change and political momentum in countless global health and sustainable development issues have demonstrated the critical role of civil society organisations in accelerating action from local to global levels. To support NCD alliances and strengthen their work during the pandemic, NCDA launched in 2020 the first-of-its-kind Civil Society Solidarity Fund on NCDs and COVID-19. The initiative supported 20 national and regional NCD alliances from Africa, Asia, Europe, Eastern Mediterranean, Latin America and the Caribbean, promoting a vibrant and strong NCD civil society capable of elevating the voices of PLWNCDs and advocating for health policy reform and accountability.

The Solidarity Fund was successful in promoting a coordinated and unified NCD civil society response to COVID-19, as well as in advancing towards more sustainable and resilient alliances able to effectively adapt to and navigate the COVID-19 landscape. The initiative supported alliances to involve and support PLWNCDs, having their views considered and their voices heard, while also ensuring that NCDs and the needs of PLWNCDs were promoted through their advocacy and communications efforts, shaping the legacy of the pandemic for “building back better”. To support future efforts supporting NCD civil society, key lessons learnt from the Solidarity Fund include the following:



Innovating advocacy in times of COVID-19

Half of alliances engaged directly with their government’s COVID-19 response plans and/or task forces; however, many of them highlighted the difficulties the pandemic posed to traditional forms of direct advocacy outreach and to ensuring NCD prioritisation in national agendas. This offers an opportunity for future initiatives to develop advocacy strategies, including digital ones, tailored to the current context, thereby ensuring civil society perspectives and needs are considered in decision making processes.

Furthering internal capacity development

Whilst the Solidarity Fund contributed to strengthening alliance’s structures and efforts, many alliances are still very much dependent on external capacity to ensure a smooth rollout of their activities. Developing alliances’ own technical capacity and expertise on NCD prevention and control is an important step towards a more resilient and self-sustainable NCD civil society.

Bringing together NCD civil society during and beyond the pandemic

In light of COVID-19, the Solidarity Fund has allowed for a coordinated and unified NCD civil society response. If we are to avoid people being left behind, including the most vulnerable, it is essential to continue supporting NCD alliances’ efforts, promoting their organisational sustainability to be strong enough to advocate for NCD prevention and control and for high-level political and media attention to NCDs during and beyond COVID-19.

As the COVID-19 pandemic prolongs, it is imperative to continue supporting NCD civil society to ensure its stability and resilience. By learning from the results and lessons learnt from the Solidarity Fund in 2020, NCDA aims to launch a second phase in 2021 to continue supporting NCD alliances to advocate for the needs of PLWNCDs and to promote health systems strengthening, recovery and resilience, with the aim of advancing towards UHC, and NCD prevention and investment, as a way of ensuring healthier societies for a better future.



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