

CASE STUDY

AFRICA NCDs NETWORK

Building a regional NCD alliance rooted in the communities it serves and equipped to mobilise for action on NCDs across the African continent



Extracted from Advocacy Institute 2020-2023 Achievements Report, November 2023.

The idea of the Africa NCDs Network (ANN) was conceived in 2015, advanced in 2016 following an African regional civil society consultation meeting organised by the WHO Regional Office for Africa and NCD Alliance, and took off in 2020 with the support of the Advocacy Institute Seed Programme. A major aim of the ANN is to accelerate implementation of the NCD Agenda on the African continent through promotion of national, sub-regional and regional policy advocacy.

When the Africa NCDs Network was selected for the Advocacy Institute Seed Programme it was operating as a loose network without a clear organisational framework. Offering the ANN structured technical and financial support, the programme accompanied the alliance as it moved through a series of steps to consolidate its governance, set its strategic direction, define a membership and stakeholder engagement model, elaborate advocacy and communications plans, build relationships with regional governmental bodies, and put down its roots with a physical secretariat in Cameroon.

“Without the institutional capacity development aspect, there would have been no proper achievement with respect to any work of the ANN. So, the major evolution of the ANN has been to move from a loose network to a physical secretariat. We know where we are coming from, we know where we are going to, and we have partnerships that are truly meaningful. These developments have really positioned ANN as a credible entity among stakeholders of the NCD response in Africa.”

Mr. Ferdinand M. Sonyuy, Chair, Africa NCDs Network

Defining a collective vision: STRATEGIC PLAN DEVELOPMENT

In 2020, the ANN commissioned the development of a stakeholder mapping to understand the profile, capacity needs and priorities of NCD actors in Africa. The mapping also served to explore existing strategies that had been effective in advancing work on NCDs at national and sub-regional levels. The findings of the mapping, focus group discussions, and a survey of ANN members went on to inform the development of a Strategic Plan organised across five strategic

pillars. The five-year plan focuses on capacity-development of national NCD alliances; locally led high-quality and relevant research on NCDs; policy engagement with development partners, governments and African governmental bodies; universal, equitable and affordable access to quality and affordable NCD care; adequate financing for NCDs; and formalised mechanisms for meaningful involvement of people living with NCDs and other vulnerable populations.

Building an inclusive network and investing in partnerships

The ANN's membership model aims to accommodate national NCD alliances and a broad range of civil society organisations (CSOs) from across Africa whose work contributes to the vision of the network. Currently, the network comprises 14 national alliances and 23 CSOs. In addition, the ANN is establishing partnerships with international organisations and foundations working on NCDs in Africa that are positioned to offer technical or financial assistance to the network or that wish to collaborate in the pursuit of shared advocacy goals.

Putting down roots: from virtual collaboration to physical Secretariat

Administratively, the ANN was initially managed by a virtual secretariat with shared decision-making by consensus, and task-sharing between four representatives of national NCD alliances based in four sub-regions of Africa. In 2023, ANN transitioned to setting up a physical secretariat, in order to officially register the network as a legal entity. Undertaking a democratic selection process, the network chose to base itself in Cameroon, where it is supported by the Cameroon NCD Alliance. The transition has allowed the ANN to streamline governance and day-to-day decision-making processes and has enabled it to operationalise its programmes and initiatives more effectively.



"The ANN has a unique position as a network of national alliances and CSOs, rooted strongly in the members that are in the communities that they serve. That means understanding what is needed, and our capacity to understand is very deep. Through internal consultations with members, we can bring out the voice of people living with NCDs and populations and communities in Africa. By bringing together national alliances and CSOs, the ANN is able to facilitate not just local responses but some sort of cross-national/continental sharing of best practices and learning that can inform the development of High-Level Strategies. I believe that governments and other key stakeholders across the continent can really draw from this."

Mr. Ferdinand M. Sonyuy, Chair, Africa NCDs Network

Influencing regional and national policy through targeted engagement

Through engagement with bodies such as WHO AFRO, Africa Centres for Disease Control (Africa CDC), and PEPFAR, the ANN has strengthened the voice of NCD civil society at consultations ranging from access to diagnostics to integration of people-centred care for NCDs and HIV/AIDS. Over the past three years, the network has participated in WHO Regional Committee Meetings, collaborating with a variety of partners, e.g., Partners in Health and the Union for International Cancer Control, on topics such as the WHO PEN-Plus Strategy, the framework for implementation of the WHO AFRO Region Mental Health Action Plan, and Financial Risk Protection towards Universal Health Coverage in the WHO AFRO Region. The network also launched a collaboration with the Africa CDC on a joint policy brief on Financing for NCDs and is in the process of formalising its relationship with the public health agency.

At national level, the ANN has seized several opportunities to establish relationships with Ministries of Health and other relevant bodies in several African countries including Cameroon, Ghana and Tanzania. Participation in regional training of ministry focal persons conducted by the Africa CDC allowed the network to consequently hold focused advocacy meetings with representatives of several Ministries of Health.

Making the invisible visible: Destigmatising mental health in Africa

According to a recent One Young World Survey, mental health is a topic of particular interest to young people in Africa. However, it receives little to no attention in public discourse despite the rise in incidence of mental health conditions. Launching a campaign to raise awareness of mental health on social media, ANN embarked on the production of a video addressing the topic with lived experience at its centre. In the clip, a person living with an NCD relates their experience with mental health issues. The video calls on African NCD stakeholders, including public health leaders, to destigmatise and prioritise mental health on the continent. The video included sign language in order to include viewers with hearing impairments.