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## Briefing for NGOs on the Work of the Noncommunicable Diseases and Mental Health Cluster

### Collaboration with the Co-operative Movement

ICA unites, represents and serves co-operatives worldwide. With 228 national and international organisations in all sectors of activity from nearly 100 countries, it alone represents 800 million individuals worldwide. Established in 1895, it was one of the first NGOs to be accorded consultative status with the United Nations in 1946.

Today, ICA is a vibrant organisation that is working on issues that touch the co-operative movement, but as co-operatives are people's enterprises with strong social commitments, they also address the larger issue of poverty, gender equality, environment, and health. In fact, one of the Co-operative Principles is care for community and thus co-operatives have a responsibility to address societal concerns including health promotion, violence and other social concerns.

Through its head and regional offices (Africa, the Americas, Asia and the Pacific, and Europe), ICA can reach a wide number of individuals. Its network spans around the world; and with an estimated 1 in 4 people touched by co-operative activity, its reach is unparalleled. It is for this reason that ICA has been participating in the Ad Hoc Advisory Group to both share experience among the members of the Ad Hoc Group, but also enable interaction with WHO officials and government representatives.

ICA welcomes the opportunity to work more closely with WHO on health promotion issues. With a membership active in all sectors of economic activity from agricultural production, processing, supply, to consumer wholesale and retailing and even the provision of health care services and safety nets, there is clearly a role for the Co-operative Movement to be working with WHO on this issue. Moreover, the impact of the co-operatives not only in terms of reach but also in terms of their impact on national economies warrants this interaction.

Many people are not aware of the size and contribution that co-operatives make. In Kenya 20% of the population is a member of a co-operative, while in Argentina it is over 29%, 33% in Norway, 40% in Canada and the United States. Co-operatives also provide over 100 million jobs around the world and in some countries and areas are among the largest employers as in Colombia where a national health co-operative is the 2nd largest employer at national level. They are also leaders in their sectors, for example, in Benin, a savings and credit co-operative federation has provided USD 16 million in rural loans in 2002 and in Kuwait co-operatives handle 80% of the retail trade business. And even in countries where resources are scarce, co-operatives have been building communities as demonstrated by the sustained investment made by co-operatives in Côte d'Ivoire which invested USD 26 million in 2002 for setting up schools, building rural roads and establishing maternal clinics.

One of the aims of the ICA is to promote the co-operative model of enterprise. Today we find that increasingly new types of co-operatives focusing on social care and health are being created both by the medical profession itself as well as by users of these services. The International Health Co-operative Organisation, an ICA sectoral organisation, is working specifically on health issues and would be a key partner. One of its upcoming activities is updating a United Nations publication issued in 1996 entitled, "Co-operative Enterprise in the Health and Social Care Sectors: A Global Survey". This will enable health officials, workers, and users to understand how the co-operative model can help bring health services to people around the world.

We hope to expand our collaboration with WHO to help contribute to the goal of better health for all.

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