

Mapping neglected tropical diseases

Neglected tropical diseases (NTDs) are a group of communicable diseases that affect more than 1.5-billion people globally, 39% of whom live in Africa. These dangerous and destructive diseases can be prevented and treated, yet they continue to cause severe disfigurement and other long-term disabilities that create obstacles to education, employment, economic growth and overall development.



Photo: WHO

In 2016, the World Health Organisation (WHO) launched the Expanded Special Project for Elimination of NTDs (ESPEN) to help all African countries accelerate the elimination of the five most prevalent NTDs by sharing best practices, coordinating activities and offering technical guidance. "NTD programmes harness diverse partnerships to drive impact - including across sectors, and countries. With communities and entire nations struggling under the burden of these diseases, increased financial support, stronger political commitment and better tools to prevent, diagnose and treat the diseases are vital to defeat NTDs", said Dr Matshidiso Moeti, WHO regional director.

At this first annual meeting, Espen programme managers and partners will provide updates and share their progress towards the NTD control and elimination. Discussions will address coordination, government ownership, partnerships, planning, advocacy and resource mobilisation.

Working together

NTDs have devastated over millions of lives for the longest time but, massive coordinated efforts have brought together governments, private sector companies, NGOs and communities from the most remote areas, proving us that the international community is on the right track, and that elimination is within reach. Throughout the continent, countries are making progress towards NTD control and elimination. In 2017, Togo eliminated lymphatic filariasis as a public health problem in Togo and this year, Ghana has done the same with trachoma. Illustrating public health as its best, health technicians, partners and community health workers have come together with a clear objective to improve the lives of millions of the most vulnerable people.

With the clear objective to promote the need for coordination of country ownership of the integrated PC-NTD programme, from the meeting shall stem key action points and recommendations to improve the implementation of annual plans and activities for the completion of the NTD Roadmap.

Rwanda programme

The Rwanda NTD programme was established in June 2007, with a \$3m three-year grant from the Legatum Foundation through Geneva Global and Columbia University's Access Project. From December 2016, the programme is implementing a grant of \$1.7m for a period up to September 2018, with direct partnership between the GoR and the END Fund.

With the above partnership, the programme has mapped most common NTDs:

- Intestinal worms: 65% (2008); 45% (2014)
- Schistosomiasis (bilharzia): 2.7% (varying from 0 to 70% in surveyed schools) (2008); 1.9% (2014); But the use of more sensitive test in 2014 has revealed higher prevalence and new hot spots with an overall prevalence of 7.4% (varying from 0 to 100% in surveyed schools) (only intestinal bilharzia was found endemic around lakes and marshes in Rwanda)
- Trachoma and lymphatic filariasis were also mapped in 2008 and found not being public health threats.
- Training of laboratory technicians on NTDs diagnosis and training of nurses and physicians on clinical management of NTDs was conducted. Currently, training on NTDs for all 45,000 CHWs is being implemented in June until July 2018.
- Since 2008, Mass Deworming campaigns (Mass Drug Administration or MDA) against intestinal worms for high risk population mainly children from 1 to 15 years and against bilharzia for children from five to 15 years from endemic areas (around lakes and marshes). This mass treatment campaign is implemented mainly through the MCH week implemented every six months.

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