



Report of the WHO Global Neglected Tropical Diseases Programme **partners' meeting**

Geneva, Switzerland, 12–13 June 2023



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Acknowledgements

The World Health Organization (WHO) extends deep gratitude and appreciation to the participants of the hybrid Global Neglected Tropical Diseases Programme Partners' Meeting held at its headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland, from 12 to 13 June 2023. WHO recognizes all those who helped to prepare for and conduct the meeting.

WHO acknowledges with thanks the contribution of all stakeholders to combatting NTDs.



“This gathering illustrates what WHO is all about – partners coming together to leverage their collective strength to address global health challenges that none of us could address alone.

A multifaceted challenge like neglected tropical diseases needs a multifaceted approach, and that is what we bring, together.”

Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus
Director-General
World Health Organization

1. Introduction

On 12–13 June 2023, at its Geneva headquarters, WHO convened a major symposium of neglected tropical disease (NTD) partners and stakeholders aimed at ensuring that the global NTD community is best placed to respond to the many challenges it faces.

The agenda is annexed to the report.

With over 300 participants in person and online, the meeting welcomed broad and diverse engagement from many countries, sectors and institutions within the global NTD community. Frank and forthright discussion was based on an unwavering collective commitment to do all that is possible to rid the world of NTDs.

The meeting produced important action points and outcomes that will help refocus the NTD community on its 2030 road map targets and on the broader health agenda that includes the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

WHO partners' meeting representation:

- Government representatives from health ministries, cooperation agencies and Permanent Missions
- technical and implementing partners
- donors
- academia and scientific societies
- pharmaceutical and diagnostic companies
- representatives of national NTD networks
- representatives of patient associations
- UN agencies and other international organizations

2. Context

NTDs are a diverse set of 20 diseases and disease groups that maim, disfigure and kill millions of people every year. Even when not deadly, they can bring about life-changing disability and profound social stigma.

The common link between these diseases is that they disproportionately affect people in the world's most disadvantaged communities. That is why NTDs are commonly referred to as diseases of poverty.

Working to combat NTDs is an all-encompassing task; effectively addressing their disease burdens requires that we also address a variety of social determinants of health.

These linkages between NTDs and social determinants of health also present unique opportunities for collaboration. For example, improving water, sanitation and hygiene, or providing an impoverished community with specific points of contact with a formal health service, are bold strides along the path towards the broader goal of achieving the best possible state of health for as many people as possible. In short, NTD interventions are a bridge that brings millions of marginalized people closer to universal health coverage.

3. Rationale

In 2020, WHO published the flagship NTD strategy and advocacy document, *Ending the neglect to attain the Sustainable Development Goals: a road map for neglected tropical diseases 2021–2030*.¹ This blueprint contains the guiding principles and pragmatic targets that will lead us to alleviate suffering and ultimately to control, eliminate and eradicate NTDs.

Two years into the period covered by the road map, it was time for WHO and for the global NTD coalition to take stock. The June 2023 NTD partners' meeting was organized to meet that need.

¹ *Ending the neglect to attain the Sustainable Development Goals: a road map for neglected tropical diseases 2021–2030*. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2020 (<https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/338565>).

4. Progress against overarching road map targets and challenges to date

The meeting heard progress reports against the targets stated in the road map (Table 1).

Table 1. Progress against overarching road map targets for 2030, as of June 2023

Outcome	Target	Progress
Reduction in the number of people requiring interventions against NTDs	90% reduction between 2010 and 2030	25% reduction between 2010 and 2021
Reduction in disability-adjusted life years (DALYs) as a result of NTDs	75% reduction between 2015 and 2030	11% reduction between 2015 and 2019
Number of countries having eliminated at least one NTD	100 countries, by 2030	49 countries
Number of NTDs eradicated	Two diseases (dracunculiasis and yaws), by 2030	<p>Dracunculiasis: Not eradicated. In 2022, four countries reported 13 human cases, a historic low; five countries remain endemic.</p> <p>Yaws: Not eradicated. Interruption of transmission certified in one country. Other countries no longer reporting cases are compiling information to start their own certification processes. In some countries with active transmission, intensified surveillance, capacity strengthening and antibiotic mass drug administration are taking place.</p>

The two years following the launch of the road map were dominated by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) crisis and its associated impacts on NTD health services and activities. This led to fewer people with NTDs being diagnosed and treated and fewer people being protected through other interventions. In the wake of COVID-19, another major challenge has been reduced funding for NTD programmes, which has hampered operations within many countries and negatively impacted the coordination and cohesive implementation of NTD control strategies globally.

Many other technical, political and programmatic challenges persist. These include:

- slow progress in some countries;
- uneven progress across the 20 diseases and disease groups;
- persistence of underlying risk factors (e.g. poverty, climate change, migration and population displacement);
- rapid population growth;
- limited access to areas affected by conflict, insecurity and political instability;
- a finite arsenal of safe and effective medicines, diagnostics, vaccines, and vector control strategies; and
- insufficient political and financial support for programmes.

5. Functional review of the Global NTD Programme

In response to these challenges and in conjunction with partners, during February–June 2023, WHO conducted a comprehensive review of the functions and operations of the Global NTD Programme. Having solicited input from partners and stakeholders, WHO recommits to embodying the values of accountability, transpar-

ency, and equity that it espouses and demands of others.

The functional review highlighted several areas requiring course correction and identified several critical missing functions within the Programme (Table 2).

Table 2. Functional review of the Global NTD Programme: missing functions and their purpose

Function	Purpose
Strategic planning for impact	Ensure activities are cohesive and support work towards the targets and strategic shifts of the road map.
Strategic engagement	Ensure that work to combat NTDs is visible, valued and prioritized throughout the global health architecture.
National coordination platforms	Ensure strong national coordination for joint planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, and supply chain management.
Research and development	Ensure coordination and prioritization of the development of new tools, to be guided by and monitored through the end-to-end process of a research and development blueprint for NTDs.
Global coordination platform	Produce and maintain a single platform for the coordination and harmonization of global efforts against NTDs, including working groups and work streams.

6. Key areas discussed and proposed actions

The following key areas of the global NTD community's work were discussed during the meeting.

6.1 Strengthen operational planning

Planning and implementation of NTD interventions should be based on a careful assessment of barriers hindering progress, at global and local levels, and detail measurable, time-framed solutions and steps aimed at overcoming such challenges and accelerating progress towards the road map targets set for 2030.

Key actions:

- Develop a Global Action Plan for 2025–2030 detailing, for the second 5 years of implementation of the road map, the activities required year by year to achieve the overarching, cross-cutting and disease-specific targets, including a timeline, roles and responsibilities and forecast cost.
- The plan should “operationalize” the road map; promote the need to pursue integration as a means to reduce inefficiencies and leverage cross-programmatic synergies; safeguard disease-specific considerations and expertise; and address the need to scale up NTD programmes in high-burden countries, and scale them down in low-burden countries approaching eradication and elimination. This will help tackle challenges such as accessing hard-to-reach, never-treated populations as well as ensuring that programmes successfully complete “the last mile” and achieve set targets. The plan will also contribute to ensuring that the three strategic shifts identified in the road map are fully enacted.

6.2 Facilitate country ownership

The principle of country ownership – whereby individual countries and governments take the prime role in determining and defining the NTD interventions carried out in their communities – is at the heart of the road map. This shift calls for activities to be planned to support capacity-building for individual countries and NTD programme managers. Operationalizing the road map's companion sustainability framework document for action against NTDs¹ requires a multisectoral approach and must be country-specific and country-driven.

Key actions:

- Strengthen and operationalize national coordination platforms to enable joint planning, monitoring and evaluation, and to better integrate supply chain management with national procurement systems.
- Foster harmonization of regulatory processes for pharmaceutical products, including those related to their importation and clearance through customs.
- Secure commitments from partners and countries to the principle of joint engagement and shared accountability.

6.3 Focus on people not programmes

Top-down, so-called vertical planning and implementation, risks losing the trust of communities in whose name and on whose lands NTD interventions are proposed. Failing to observe the rights of persons affected by or at risk of NTDs constitutes an existential threat to the effectiveness of programmes.

Key actions:

- Institutionalize a health equity and human rights perspective to addressing NTD burdens, by means of person-centred and community-based approaches.

¹ *Ending the neglect to attain the Sustainable Development Goals: a sustainability framework for action against neglected tropical diseases, 2021-2030*. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2021 (<https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/338886>).

- Encourage the establishment of NTD patients' associations, and involve those directly affected by NTDs in planning and execution of NTD interventions, particularly for the purposes of communication and community engagement.
- Develop "communities of practice" to build both the capacity and the confidence of the NTD workforce in all its forms; encourage mentorship programmes to transfer knowledge and savoir faire; promote multidisciplinary as a tool to effectively tackling NTDs.
- Engage youth in NTD fora and leverage their energies as a powerful tool for advocacy and civil-society mobilization; encourage inter-generational partnership.

6.4 Measure impact

NTD interventions and programmes should be evidence-driven at all levels. Scientific rigour is needed to allow us to demonstrate the value and impact of our work. All stakeholders within the Global NTD Programme require transparent, credible data. WHO will ensure that data systems are strengthened at all levels by working with national governments and other stakeholders.

Key actions:

- Strengthen data systems and the integration of NTD data processes with national health information systems and platforms.
- Ensure consistent reporting across all NTDs and all road map indicators; reduce fragmentation of reporting by facilitating the mainstreaming and integration of NTD data into the World Health Data Hub.
- Harmonize tools for monitoring and evaluation of NTDs and ensure they are designed to support decisions made by countries; this will require deliberate and specific investment of time and money in monitoring and evaluation.
- Prioritize integrated mapping, impact surveys and surveillance, including post-elimination

surveillance and surveillance for antimicrobial resistance.

- Ensure the appropriate and efficient use of digital tools and new technologies, including artificial intelligence, where needed, to facilitate immediate and durable access to data and rapid decision-making.

6.5 Promote coordination, collaboration, leadership and partnership

The global NTD community is a passionate and committed force with a wealth and diversity of expertise, knowledge, and skills. Leveraging this force must be a goal for all partners, as must be the pooling, sharing and extension of knowledge and expertise. This, in turn, requires more and better coordination in all areas including advocacy and policy, research and development, as well as supply chain management.

Key actions:

- Facilitate exchanges among existing NTD platforms, networks, initiatives and fora, at international and national levels; promote horizontal and regional cooperation; develop communities of practice to strengthen cohesive approaches to tackle specific themes; forge links with key global health actors that are currently not optimally engaged in work on NTDs; promote cross-sectoral collaboration; and convene NTD partners' meetings at regular intervals.
- Foster collaboration with regard to research on NTDs, for example in the areas of new medicines and diagnostics, and to find efficiency gains in integrating approaches across diseases.
- Review policies, practices and impact generated by other public health programmes facing similar challenges, such as the Global Polio Eradication Initiative, and identify lessons learnt with the aim of improving the performance of global NTD interventions (e.g. in countries affected by instability and conflicts).

- Encourage cross-border collaboration, especially with regard to diseases targeted for elimination or eradication.
- Create harmonization groups with broad stakeholder representation to generate coordinated work plans with agreed short- and mid-term objectives.
- Within WHO, forge the spirit of one “WHO Global NTD Programme” by strengthening coordinated planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation across the three levels of the Organization.

6.6 Reposition NTDs within the global health architecture

The relevance of NTDs in global and local public health agendas and fora should be reinforced, based on the consideration that interventions against NTDs can contribute to a wide range of health programmes, and can conversely benefit from their mainstreaming into existing health delivery mechanisms and processes.

Key actions:

- Extend and expand the global NTD community to mobilize all available energies and

resources, by strengthening linkages between NTDs and a wide range of cross-cutting and multisectoral themes, including social determinants of health; emergency preparedness and response; water, sanitation and hygiene; climate change; migration and urbanization; mental health; and One Health.

- Advocate for and put into practice the elements that will enable NTD interventions to be included in nascent pathways aimed at strengthening health systems and primary health care (e.g. by ensuring inclusion of NTDs into packages of care); promote access to interventions against NTDs as a tracer of progress towards universal health coverage.
- Reinforce advocacy and resource mobilization, within and outside WHO; ensure that approaches to advocacy and resource mobilization are targeted, realistic, strategic and flexible; expand the donor base; and encourage allocation of domestic funding, by ensuring political commitment and fostering demand for services in countries affected by NTDs.
- Establish flagship programmes and utilize them to increase visibility of NTDs.



7. Way forward

In approaching the conclusion of the meeting, delegates agreed that inaction – or even business as usual – is no longer an option. As Dr Ibrahima Socé Fall, Director of the WHO Global NTD Programme, noted, *“If we do not challenge ourselves, how can we evolve and improve?”*

With that in mind, the global community of partners resolved to take action in order to accelerate progress towards the 2030 targets. This can only be done through partnership.

Partnership is the beating heart of an operational global network.

Only a strong partnership, based on mutual trust and shared values, will enable us to achieve our goals.

These principles require practical application as we strive to make NTDs a cornerstone of the global public health architecture.

The strengths that we as a community call on as we design and implement our interventions – from policy-makers to field teams who routinely reach the most remote and inaccessible communities – will serve us well as we seek to tie NTDs to much-needed progress towards universal health coverage and primary health care.

Stronger together, towards 2030.

Annex. Agenda

Global Neglected Tropical Diseases Programme Partners' Meeting

12–13 June 2023

Auditorium, World Health Organization, Geneva, Switzerland

Day 1		
MORNING SESSION Chair: Ibrahima Socé Fall		
09:00–09:20	Welcome note Opening remarks	Jérôme Salomon Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus
09:20–09:25	Success stories	Video compilation
09:25–09:45	Progress since 2021	Albis Gabrielli
09:45–10:10	Group photo	
10:10–11:40	Functional review outcomes and strategic priorities	Ibrahima Socé Fall
11:40–12:00	Costing the NTD road map (presentation)	Costing task team
12:00–14:00	Lunch break	All
AFTERNOON SESSION Chairs: Ibrahima Socé Fall (costing); Lucille Blumberg, Yvan Hutin (other sessions)		
14:00–14:30	Costing the NTD road map (discussion)	Video compilation
14:30–15:30	Panel discussion: Identifying barriers to progress Alda Maria da Cruz Ministry of Health, Brazil Rajiv Manjhi Ministry of Health, India Amar Timalisina IDEA - International Association for Integration, Dignity and Economic Advancement Benido Impouma WHO Regional Office for Africa Jordan Tappero Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation Ellen Agler The END Fund Lynn Leonard NTD Supply Chain Forum Girija Sankar NTD NGO Network	Moderator: Lucille Blumberg
15:30–17:00	Moderated discussion: Overcoming barriers Introduction • Pillar 1: Accelerate programmatic action • Pillar 2: Intensify cross-cutting approaches • Pillar 3: Change operating models and culture to facilitate country ownership Wrap-up	Moderator: Yvan Hutin
17:00–18:30	Cocktail reception (WHO main restaurant)	All

Day 2		
MORNING SESSION Chairs: Yvan Hutin, Pat Lammie		
09:00–09:30	Towards sustainability of NTD interventions	Emily Wainwright
09:30–10:45	Moderated discussion: Surveillance, monitoring and evaluation for NTDs Philippe Boucher Integrating NTDs into the World Health Data Hub Stéphane de la Rocque Country capacities for health emergency preparedness Aidan O’Leary Hard-to-reach populations Luis Gerardo Castellanos Integrated surveillance Paul Emerson Impact surveys Kashef Ijaz NTDs: challenges of the last mile	Moderator: Pat Lammie
10:45–12:00	Moderated discussion: Repositioning NTDs within the global health architecture <i>Achieving UHC</i> Shams Syed Universal health coverage/ Primary health care Susan Sparkes Health system strengthening <i>Preparedness and response to emergencies</i> Chikwe Ihekweazu Emergency preparedness and response <i>Multisectoral action</i> Sophie Boisson Water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) Mark Booth Climate change Graham Alabaster Migration and urbanization Junxia Song One Health	Moderator: Yvan Hutin
12:00–14:00	Lunch break	All

Day 2		
MORNING SESSION		
Chairs: Yvan Hutin, Pat Lammie		
AFTERNOON SESSION		
Chairs: Isaac Chikwanha, Thoko Elphick-Pooley		
14:00–16:00	<p>Panel discussion: Accelerating progress towards 2030: what is needed?</p> <p>Christelle Somtinda Nikiema Ministry of Health Togo</p> <p>Emily Wainwright United States Agency for International Development</p> <p>Lubna Qassim Permanent Mission of UAE to UN Office in Geneva</p> <p>Suman Rijal WHO Regional Office for South-East Asia</p> <p>Katey Owen Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation</p> <p>Dipendra Raman Singh Ministry of Health, Nepal</p> <p>Erika Placella Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation</p> <p>Xiao-Nong Zhou Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention</p> <p>Alistair Mukondiwa WHO Youth Council</p>	<p>Moderators: Isaac Chikwanha, Thoko Elphick-Pooley</p>
15:30–17:00	<p>Action points and next steps</p> <p>Wrap up and closure of the Global NTD Programme Partners' Meeting</p>	<p>WHO Ibrahima Socé Fall</p>

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