

# NTDS AND WASH: INNOVATING TOGETHER

Primary prevention for the control of NTDs relies heavily on improved water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH). There are numerous NTD transmission routes that can be interrupted with improved WASH. In addition to preventing disease, improved WASH is vital to NTD-related wound and morbidity management and disability prevention.

To date, NTD control initiatives have relied predominantly on mass drug administration (MDA). While MDA includes the treatment of disease, as well as delivery of drugs as preventive chemotherapy (PCT), studies have shown continued re-infection post-PCT where WASH interventions are not part of the strategy.<sup>1</sup>

Water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) play a critical role in the prevention of and care for 5 of the 10 London Declaration NTDs. While the evidence base of which WASH improvements most efficiently leverage the most effective and sustainable NTD control or elimination, there are multiple areas ripe for informed, active collaboration:

- developing in-country connections in nations with both a strong capacity for MDA and explicit commitments to universal access to water and sanitation;

- creating effective ways for the NTD and WASH sectors to exchange information, and harmonize and amplify behavior-changing messages;
- sharing and/or coordinating mapping and data collection, given both the common geographic and demographic targets, and goal of disease-free communities;
- informing the bi-lateral gaps, barriers, and technical obstacles to NTD and WASH partnering efforts; and
- examining cross-cutting opportunities such as fully integrating the school-based platform of NTD MDA, WASH, and nutrition interventions, which could lead to high-impact health benefits, increased donor commitment, and service-delivery efficiency and cost-effectiveness.

We welcome the new WHO strategy (see box this page), which can only serve to strengthen the collaboration between the NTD and WASH sectors, towards the common goal of meeting the WHO Roadmap targets for NTDs.

1. Jia T-W, Melville S, Utzinger J, King CH, Zhou X-N (2012) Soil-transmitted helminth reinfection after drug treatment: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *PLoS Negl Trop Dis* 6: e1621. doi: 10.1371/journal.pntd.0001621

## A new WHO effort – collaboration on water, sanitation, hygiene and NTDs

A new strategy has been developed to guide national programs and partners in implementing NTD programs, in collaboration with water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH). WASH plays a critical role in the prevention of, and care of 16 of the 17 neglected tropical diseases (NTDs), scheduled for intensified control or elimination by 2020. However, how these important complementary health interventions are implemented, need to be defined to ensure maximum impact.

The vision of the new strategy is *accelerated and sustained achievement of the NTD roadmap targets, particularly among the poorest and most vulnerable, through better-targeted WASH and NTDs efforts.*

The strategy informs WHO's actions and those of endemic countries and partners, aiming for *mutual reference and embedding of WASH and NTDs aspects in sector plans and programs, with full integration of programs where appropriate.* It includes four strategic objectives, enhanced awareness and experience sharing, monitoring,

increasing evidence for improved practice, and joint planning and delivery.

Collaboration between WASH and NTDs stakeholders is essential to meet many of the NTD roadmap targets, and offers important co-benefits to both communities. Opportunities for joint work include; the development of comprehensive disease control plans, improving the targeting and effectiveness of WASH interventions for disease-control purposes, and improving the quality of facility-based care and self-care aspects of NTD programs.

The new development of a solid path forward, with attention to doing and learning, will guide future work and collaboration. Carrying out this strategy, will not only improve the NTD effort, but will also contribute to the vision expressed in the Sustainable Development Goals, of shared prosperity, strengthened health systems, universal health coverage, and equitable access to resources and services that underpin human development.