Expanded Special Project for Elimination of Neglected Tropical Diseases (ESPEN)

ESPEN is a platform of support hosted and managed by the World Health Organization (WHO) Regional Office for Africa (AFRO) dedicated to reducing the burden of the five most prevalent neglected tropical diseases (NTDs) on the African continent. ESPEN, which will run from 2016 to 2020, will provide technical and fundraising support to endemic countries to help fight soil-transmitted helminths, lymphatic filariasis, schistosomiasis, onchocerciasis and trachoma.

ESPEN will build on the success and lessons of WHO’s most recent NTD control partnership, the African Programme for Onchocerciasis Control (APOC), which was highly effective at reducing the burden of this disease on the continent. Ultimately, ESPEN aims to bolster national programs’ capacity to eliminate onchocerciasis and other preventable and treatable NTDs, making use of the tools at our disposal and improving the quality of life of the hundreds of millions of affected individuals.

**What Will ESPEN Do?**

Under the leadership of national programs, ESPEN will work to strengthen coordination across all of the partners working to combat NTDs. ESPEN will initially focus efforts on those countries with the highest burden of disease, those close to elimination or those that have already reached elimination and need help with verification, and Ebola-affected countries in need of immediate support. Specifically, ESPEN will provide technical assistance to countries in mapping their burden of disease, delivering treatments efficiently, and certifying when they reach their elimination goals. To strengthen accountability and promote an evidence-based approach, ESPEN will create an online portal where NTD data can be accessed at the country level.

**ESPEN’s Goals**

ESPEN’s primary goal is to significantly reduce the prevalence of five NTDs between 2016 and 2020, in concert with the WHO’s Roadmap for NTDs. The success of the project will be measured against a set of key objectives:

- Ensure countries have the tools they need to eliminate these five leading NTDs in Africa by helping identify gaps in national NTD programmes
- Support national NTD programmes in their efforts to reach every community and individual in need
- Strengthen capacity of countries to collect, analyse, share and use data effectively
- Identify funding opportunities and investment targets to make in-country NTD programmes more effective and sustainable

**WHAT ARE NEGLECTED TROPICAL DISEASES?**

Neglected tropical diseases (NTDs) are a group of infections that place a constant and heavy burden primarily on the poorest, most marginalized communities in the world. NTDs affect around one billion people globally, 40% of whom live in the African region. NTDs can be prevented and treated, yet they continue to disfigure and disable, destroying lives, preventing children from going to school, and keeping communities in cycles of poverty.
Mass Drug Administration: A Game-changing Treatment

Mass drug administration (MDA) involves reaching entire at-risk communities annually with safe and effective drugs to treat and prevent NTDs.

- Since 2000, a total of more than 5.5 billion doses of medicine have been delivered, providing 3.5 billion treatments to 1 billion people
- Since 2013, 493.5 million people have been treated with MDA
- In 2015 alone, pharmaceutical companies donated 1.5 billion treatments for NTDs globally

The scale-up of MDA across the continent has been a remarkable achievement. Of those that need preventive chemotherapy, 43.3% are receiving treatment – an increase from 35.5% in 2008. This is strong progress, but increased access to treatment is needed to finish the job and achieve control and elimination targets.

With nearly one in six people worldwide requiring treatment for at least one NTD, ESPEN will strengthen MDA in Africa by ensuring endemic countries have the right tools and technical expertise available.

A Global Health Best-Buy

ESPEN seeks to reduce the enormous toll of NTDs on Africa’s economic productivity. Achieving the NTD goals would:

- Generate an estimated $565 billion in productivity gains globally by 2030
- Produce up to $184 in improved economic productivity for every $1 invested
- Recover an estimated 600 million disability-adjusted life-years globally between 2011 and 2030

Reducing the burden of NTDs is an essential part of creating a healthy and prosperous future for Africa. ESPEN is committed to helping all countries in the region reach their goals for NTD control, elimination and eradication.

THE LONDON DECLARATION

In January 2012, a coalition of philanthropic organisations, donor countries, governments of NTD-endemic countries and pharmaceutical companies signed the London Declaration, committing to control, eliminate, or eradicate 10 NTDs – a turning point in the fight against these diseases. Since the declaration was signed, more than 5.5 billion treatments have been donated by pharmaceutical companies, and NTD programmes treated more than 858 million people around the world in 2014.