

## **BRIEFING FOR MEMBER STATES**

### **POLITICAL DECLARATION OF THE HIGH-LEVEL MEETING ON PANDEMIC PREVENTION, PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE**

The Political Declaration of the High-Level Meeting on Pandemic Preparedness and Response (PPR) provides a welcome opportunity to highlight how experience gained in the field of neglected tropical diseases (NTDs) can be utilised to mitigate the impact of future pandemics and for future pandemic prevention, preparedness, and response efforts.

#### **NEGLECTED TROPICAL DISEASES ARE DISEASES OF INEQUITY**

Neglected tropical diseases (NTDs) are a group of twenty preventable and treatable diseases that affect more than one billion people worldwide. NTDs cause immeasurable suffering. They debilitate, disfigure and can be fatal. By most commonly affecting some of the most vulnerable people in the world – who often live in remote communities – NTDs create generational cycles of poverty and cost low-and-middle income countries billions of dollars every year.

The link between NTDs, COVID-19 responses and PPR is clear. Without strengthening the systems used to combat NTDs, no country will be able to detect, prevent, prepare and respond to future pandemics.

For example, existing NTD surveillance systems (including data, diagnostics and labs) can be used to detect pandemic-potential diseases. In many rural and isolated communities, NTD control and elimination programmes are the only health services available. The experience gained from these already embedded 'last mile' programmes can be utilized to support national responses to future pandemics.

It is important to recognise that by strengthening the Primary Health Care system and making it more resilient, services provided by community-based health workers - who are most likely to be on the frontline of any future pandemic response - will be strengthened. After all, community health workers trained to track, prevent, detect, diagnose and treat NTDs were essential in the fight against COVID-19 in many countries.

There is also a need to ensure that routine health services are not disrupted by future pandemics or health crises. The protection and maintenance of essential health services that many rely on should be considered a priority in response to any

emergency, yet the COVID-19 pandemic hugely impacted existing NTD services. In the first year of the pandemic, **NTD services were the second most frequently disrupted service** and **the most affected in terms of the severity of this disruption**, according to the WHO Global Pulse Survey 2023. Still today, NTD services have not fully recovered from this shock.

## **NTDS AND PANDEMIC PREVENTION, PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE**

**Prevention** – Several NTDs, including dengue and chikungunya, have pandemic potential and therefore we need to invest in controlling and eliminating these diseases now, especially whilst we have drug donation programmes. Furthermore, NTD surveillance systems (including data, diagnostics and labs) can be used for surveillance for pandemic-potential diseases. NTD surveillance systems need to be expanded to integrate surveillance for new and emerging diseases. Early detection can minimise the potential of a future pandemic outbreak. Likewise, we must ensure that financing is maintained for existing endemic health issues and not reallocated to health emergencies to avoid eroding gains made over decades.

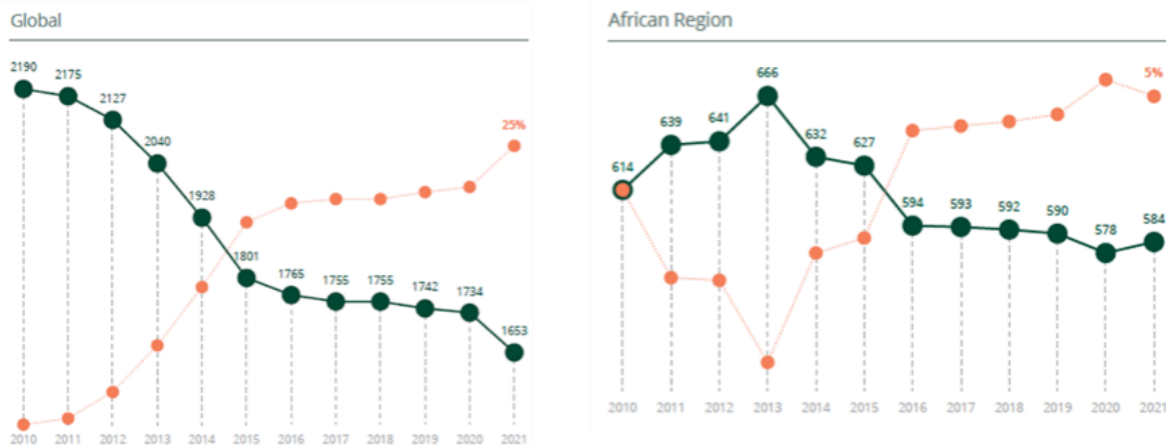
**Preparedness** – NTD programmes build both the capacity and capability of health workers in rural communities. They also build trust with the local health workers who are sometimes the only health services that rural isolated communities see and engage with. In addition, many NTDs are scheduled for elimination. Eliminating NTDs will release resources to other health areas and can reduce strain on overburdened health systems, especially in times of crisis. States need to generate local epidemiological data including on co-infections and co-morbidities to avoid exacerbating the impact of any disease that may arise from a future pandemic or health emergency.

**Response** - The experience gained and reach of existing NTD control and elimination programmes already embedded in rural communities, can be utilized to support national responses to future pandemics, as it was for COVID-19.

## **FINANCIAL IMPACT OF NTDS**

Funding NTDs makes solid financial sense. Many low-cost interventions for NTDs exist, are affordable to implement in low-income settings, yield a robust return on investment and are regarded as a development best-buy. Drug donations for interventions like preventive chemotherapy, for example, have been particularly efficacious and cost-effective, with over 19 billion tablets donated at the [Kigali Summit on malaria and NTDs](#) by the pharmaceutical industry to deliver the [WHO NTD road map](#) so far. The end of NTDs offers a net benefit to affected individuals of about US\$25 for every dollar invested by funders—a 30 percent annualized rate of return.

From the WHO report published January 2023\*: number of people requiring interventions against NTDs (green) and associated percentage reduction (orange), 2010-2021



## SUCCESS

Investments in NTDs have been a global success story to date. **49 countries have eliminated at least one NTD** and **over the last decade (2010-2021), we've seen 600 million people no longer require treatment for an NTD**, demonstrating that it is possible to reach some of the world's poorest and most remote communities through creative, low-cost programmes. Yet, despite these incredible impacts, NTD programmes are facing critical funding gaps that threaten progress to date.

Using the experience garnered in the fight against NTDs, it is clear that there is a compelling case to be made for investment in NTD programmes as a means by which to help prevent, prepare and respond to any future pandemic. Yet funding for NTDs is nowhere near enough. NTD programmes do not benefit from sustainable and predictable financing, relying on the goodwill of donors, threatening progress. **It will be essential that any new investments to PPR prioritises NTDs.**

## WE URGE YOU TO:

**Ensure that the Political Declaration on Pandemic Prevention Preparedness and Response specifically addresses the needs of the 1.65 billion** people currently requiring an intervention against NTDs by:

- 1. Ensuring that new investments in PPR prioritise investments in NTDS** and that financing for existing endemic health issues is maintained and not reallocated to health emergencies. New financing should include investments in research, innovation and access, for vaccines, new drugs and diagnostics for NTDs.

**HOW?**

*PPI Bis Recognize that existing health issues may need to be designated as a health emergency during a pandemic, to access funding, maintain progress and avoid erosion of gains made, (New Language)*

- 2. Recognising the importance of expanding existing NTD surveillance systems** for new and emerging diseases.

**HOW?**

*INS: OP28 Bis Urge member states to strengthen and expand existing disease surveillance systems, especially on neglected tropical diseases targeted for eradication, to strengthen community-based data collection and information sharing practices and widen them to integrate surveillance for new and emerging diseases (Based on WHA 66.12 OP 1(2))*

- 3. Recognising the benefits of the capacity, capability and trust built up in rural communities** by NTD programmes for future pandemic preparedness, prevention, and response.
- 4. Advocating for investments in Primary Health Care** to ensure that community-based health systems are efficient and effective. PHC is the backbone of health systems and should be structured to support the delivery of essential packages of care that prioritise underserved communities. NTD interventions must form part of PHC and included in essential packages of care.
- 5. Calling for a UN High-Level Meeting on Neglected Tropical Diseases in 2025.** To date there have been high-level political meetings on HIV/AIDS, AMR and TB and yet not on NTDs. We need to drive political action and mobilise the resources to deliver SDG 3 in its entirety.

Finally, we urge all countries to show political leadership and country ownership by endorsing the **Kigali Declaration on NTDs**<sup>1</sup>. The Kigali Declaration is a high-level, political declaration that is mobilising political will, community commitment, resources and action, and securing commitments needed to end the suffering caused by NTDs.

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<sup>1</sup> The Kigali Declaration on Neglected Tropical Diseases has to date been endorsed by the following countries: Belgium, Botswana, Canada, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Germany, Japan, Ghana, Malawi, Nigeria, Papua New Guinea, Rwanda, Switzerland, UAE, UK, United Republic of Tanzania, USA, Timor Leste, Uganda, Vanuatu