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New Report: Investments in Neglected Tropical Diseases are one of the Best Buys in Development

Third progress report since the London Declaration on NTDs shows strong endemic country leadership, calls on partners to scale up efforts in order to reach WHO targets

London, United Kingdom, 25 June 2015 — A new report by *Uniting to Combat NTDs* highlights dramatic health and economic benefits from investing in combating neglected tropical diseases, making it one of the best buys in development.

The report, entitled [Country Leadership and Collaboration on Neglected Tropical Diseases](#) and launched today in London, comes on the heels of increased attention to NTDs at the [World Health Assembly](#) and inclusion in the recent [G7 Leaders' Declaration](#). The report finds that countries are increasingly taking ownership of NTD programs, have started providing new funding and are pursuing innovative approaches to combat these devastating diseases. Yet while these new methods have produced substantial progress, further scale-up is necessary to reach the World Health Organization's (WHO) 2020 targets.

"It is encouraging to see increased state-level engagement and strong leadership towards ownership of national control programs," said Dr. Dirk Engels, WHO Director of the Department of Control of Neglected Tropical Diseases. "Sustained political commitment, innovative domestic financing and greater coordination can bring about game-changing treatments and care to millions of people and improve the prospects of achieving WHO's goal of universal health coverage against NTDs."

Country Leadership and Collaboration on Neglected Tropical Diseases is the third progress report since a diverse public-private coalition of partners endorsed the 2012 London Declaration on NTDs, committing to achieve the WHO's 2020 targets for 10 NTDs: diseases of poverty that affect one in six people worldwide.

NTD Programs Provide an Enormous Return on Investment

NTDs keep children out of school, parents out of work, and cause stunting and impaired brain development, locking societies into endless cycles of poverty. According to the report, if countries achieve WHO's 2020 targets, healthier citizens would generate an estimated US\$623 billion in increased productivity between 2015 and 2030 – meaning that for each \$US1 invested in NTD scale-up, endemic countries would see productivity gains of US\$51 from 2015-2020 and US\$184 for 2021-2030.

The report also shows for the first time the full burden of illness, disability, and deaths caused by NTDs, finding it at the same order of magnitude as the "Big Three" diseases: HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria.



Affected Countries are Increasingly Leading the Fight against NTDs

Endemic countries are increasing domestic funding for NTDs and innovating to find new ways to deliver critical drugs. In doing so, they are improving coverage rates and making strides toward eliminating these diseases, with many already achieving elimination goals for individual diseases.

Key statistics:

- **Global coverage is increasing:** approximately 785 million people (43% of at-risk populations) were reached with at least one drug, compared to around 35% in 2008.
- **126 cases of Guinea worm disease were reported in 2014**, a staggering 99.99% drop since 1986. Only 5 cases have been reported so far in 2015.
- **Of the 81 countries endemic for Lymphatic filariasis (LF), 25 countries (31%) are no longer in need of mass drug administration (MDA)**, including 10 which have successfully eliminated transmission.
- **Fewer than 4,000 new cases of human African trypanosomiasis** (also known as sleeping sickness) were reported to WHO last year, the lowest level in at least 75 years.

Since December 2014, 26 Ministers of Health have pledged to take ownership and increase local investment in NTD efforts as part of the [Addis Ababa NTD Commitment](#). Several countries have already taken on primary responsibility for financing their NTD programs: Bangladesh and the Philippines pay for 85% and 94% of their NTD programs, respectively, and Honduras recently became the first Latin American country to launch a national NTD program fully financed by the government.

"The global effort to control and eliminate neglected tropical diseases must be led by the countries themselves," said Kesetebirhan Admasu, Minister of Health, Ethiopia. "Through the Addis Commitment, and with the support of the international community, we will do whatever is necessary to see an end to these terrible diseases."

"The future of Malawi relies on addressing the causes of poverty and in ending the suffering caused by neglected tropical diseases," said Dr. Jean A.N. Kalilani, MP, Minister of Health, Malawi. "I am personally committed to the control and elimination of these diseases within Malawi and am proud that we are leading the way in committing to end these horrific diseases."

Global Coalition, Including Private Sector, Champions New Way to Help World's Poorest

The backbone of these efforts is a diverse and committed public-private partnership that champions a new way of improving the lives of the world's poorest people. As part of this partnership, pharmaceutical companies have donated 3.5 billion NTD treatments since the launch of the London Declaration and are committed to donate about \$17.8 billion worth of NTD drugs through 2020, making it the largest drug donation program in the world. Since 2012, there has been a 36% increase in donated drugs.

"Debilitating illnesses like lymphatic filariasis are on the retreat, partly due to public-private partnerships that help make sure donated medicines and essential healthcare reach those who need them most," said Andy Wright, vice-president for global health programs at GSK and chair of the Partnership for Disease Control Initiatives. "These collective efforts provide a powerful blueprint for working together to free communities from the burden of disease and enabling them to thrive."

Other partners are collaborating to find innovative ways to advance NTD progress. This includes the Global Trachoma Mapping Project, the largest infectious disease mapping exercise in history; the formation of a Global Schistosomiasis Alliance to improve coverage for the disease and galvanize progress; an NTD modelling consortium aimed at better understanding effective control strategies in particular settings; and innovative research into new drugs, diagnostic tools and operational approaches.

“Neglected tropical diseases, from bilharzia to elephantiasis, are causing disability, disfigurement and around half a million deaths every year,” said Desmond Swayne, UK International Development Minister. “These horrific diseases affect the very poorest and most marginalised people in the world. We cannot, and will not, turn our backs while people suffer. Britain is currently protecting millions of people around the world from these diseases; for example, by helping to bring Guinea Worm close to eradication. This important report shows just how effective aid invested in fighting these diseases can be. We now need others to step up and build on the progress made.”

The Children’s Investment Fund Foundation (CIFF) also announced a new \$20 million commitment to help finish the job of eradicating Guinea Worm disease.

“It’s simply not acceptable that 800 million children worldwide are at risk from horrific intestinal worms, despite the existence of a cheap and simple solution,” said Michael Anderson, CEO at CIFF. “Today’s announcement builds on our ongoing commitments to support national deworming programmes in Africa and India.”

Confronting Challenges

Despite progress, the report identifies several areas where progress must be accelerated:

- **Coverage rates:** While more people are being reached, improvement in many places remains too low to achieve set goals. A scorecard released with the report shows progress against schistosomiasis lags behind other diseases despite the availability of a simple treatment.
- **New diagnostics and tools:** Reaching WHO roadmap targets for a number of these diseases relies on new diagnostics and tools, some of which are still in development, underscoring the importance of prioritizing research and development.
- **Funding:** Scaling up programs to address these gaps requires additional funding. The report cites an annual delivery funding gap of US\$200-300 million between now and 2020. The WHO estimates that low- and middle-income countries could fully fund their share of universal coverage against NTDs with less than 0.1% of domestic spending on health.

"We have known for some time that investing in NTDs is a best buy in development," said Lisa Rotondo, Project Director at RTI International. "There are still challenges ahead, but the NGO community is committed to reaching the targets established by WHO, and we welcome additional collaborators in support of endemic countries."

Uniting to Combat Neglected Tropical Diseases



Established in 2012, Uniting to Combat NTDs is a group of organizations committed to achieving the WHO's 2020 goal to control and eliminate 10 NTDs as laid out in the [London Declaration](#). By working together, Uniting to Combat NTDs aims to chart a new course toward health and sustainability among the world's poorest communities.

The 10 diseases covered by the London Declaration include river blindness, Guinea worm disease, lymphatic filariasis, blinding trachoma, schistosomiasis, soil-transmitted helminths, leprosy, Chagas disease, visceral leishmaniasis and sleeping sickness.

To find out more about the work of Uniting to Combat NTDs and to learn more about NTDs, please visit our [website](#).