

Briefing Paper

Committee: Health

Topic: The Question of Neglected Tropical Diseases

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Summary

Neglected Tropical Diseases (NTDs) are a group of communicable diseases that predominantly affect populations living in poverty in the tropical and subtropical regions. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), over 1.7 billion people worldwide are at risk of NTDs. The most prominent NTDs are dengue, schistosomiasis, lymphatic filariasis, trachoma, leishmaniasis, Chagas disease, and soil-transmitted helminth infections.

NTDs are known for their strong association with poor living conditions, limited access to healthcare, inadequate water and sanitation infrastructure, and weak disease monitoring systems. While many NTDs are preventable or treatable through existing interventions, they continue to create a significant burden on public health, as they contribute largely to chronic illness, disability, stigma, and reduced economic productivity in affected communities.

Global efforts to combat NTDs have increased in recent decades, including initiatives led by the WHO, pharmaceutical donation programs, and mass drug administration (MDA) campaigns. However, progress is still uneven across regions. This is due to challenges such as insufficient funding, logistical barriers, conflict and displacement, climate change, and emerging drug resistance which continue to hinder efforts to eliminate NTDs.

The issue of NTDs is linked to broader development concerns, including health equity, poverty reduction, education, and sustainable development. Addressing the problem of NTDs requires coordinated action at the national, regional, and international levels, involving governments, international organisations, non-governmental organisations, and the private sector. This question allows discussion on how existing strategies can be strengthened and adapted to ensure sustainable and equitable progress toward global NTD control and elimination goals, including those outlined in the WHO 2030 Roadmap.

Definition of Key Terms

Neglected Tropical Diseases (NTDs) – A diverse group of conditions caused by a variety of pathogens (including viruses, bacteria, parasites, fungi and toxins) and associated with devastating health, social and economic consequences.

World Health Organisation (WHO) – A specialised agency of the United Nations responsible for international public health, including setting guidelines and coordinating global efforts to control and eliminate NTDs.

Mass Drug Administration (MDA) – A campaign strategy in which all people in an area are given treatment regardless of their disease status. This strategy has been used over the past few decades extensively as part of global efforts to control and eliminate neglected tropical diseases, particularly those that are preventable through this type of treatment and for which drugs are available.

Vector Borne Diseases – Human illnesses caused by parasites, viruses and bacteria that are transmitted by vectors.

Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) – Interventions focused on improving access to clean water, safe sanitation, facilities, and hygiene practices, which are essential for preventing many NTDs.

Disease Surveillance – Serves as the basis for the detection of potential outbreaks for an early warning system to prevent what could become public health emergencies.

Endemic – A term used to describe diseases that are consistently present in a particular geographic region or population.

Elimination – The reduction of disease transmission to zero in a defined geographic area, though continued monitoring may still be required.

Eradication – The permanent global reduction of a disease to zero cases, with no further interventions required.

WHO 2023 NTD Roadmap – A global framework established by the WHO outlining targets and strategies for the prevention, control, elimination and eradication of NTDs by 2030

Health Equity – The principle of ensuring fair and just access to healthcare and health outcomes, particularly for marginalized and vulnerable populations.

Pharmaceutical Donation Programs – Initiatives in which pharmaceutical companies provide medications free of charge to support NTD control and elimination efforts.

Social Determinants of Health – The economic, environmental, and social conditions—such as poverty, education, and housing - that influence health outcomes and contribute to the persistence of NTDs.

Background Information

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), more than 1.495 billion people worldwide need preventive or therapeutic treatment for at least one neglected tropical disease each year. NTDs place a heavy burden on affected populations, causing around 120,000 deaths annually and leading to approximately 14.1 million disability-adjusted life years (DALYs) lost. These figures reflect not only the health impacts of NTDs, but also their long-term effects on quality of life.

As well as health consequences, NTDs create serious economic and social challenges, particularly in low and middle-income countries. They cost developing communities billions of US dollars each year through increased healthcare spending, reduced worker productivity, and lower educational achievements. Many NTDs cause long-term or permanent disabilities, which limit individuals' ability to work or attend school. As a result, families may lose income while also facing ongoing medical expenses, which increases the risk of poverty.

NTDs often lead to stigma and social exclusion, especially when visible symptoms are present. Affected individuals may experience discrimination, reduced social participation, and barriers to education and employment. These social impacts further worsen inequality and can prevent people from seeking early treatment due to fear or lack of awareness.

NTDs have been known to receive limited attention within global health policy compared to other major diseases. It was not until 2015, with the adoption of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), that NTDs were formally recognised under Target 3.3, which aims to end epidemics of neglected tropical diseases by 2030. Progress on NTDs is therefore closely linked to achieving SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-Being). Furthermore, effective action against NTDs can also support other SDGs, including those related to poverty reduction, education, clean water and sanitation, reduced inequalities, and sustainable economic growth, emphasising the wider importance of addressing NTDs at both national and global levels.

Major Countries and Organizations Involved

Efforts to combat Neglected Tropical Diseases (NTDs) involve cooperation between endemic countries, major donor states, international organisations, non-governmental actors, and the private sector. Endemic countries carry the greatest burden of NTDs and therefore play a central role in prevention and treatment efforts. In particular, Nigeria, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda, and Sudan in sub-Saharan Africa; India, Bangladesh, Indonesia, and Myanmar in South and Southeast Asia; Brazil, Mexico, Bolivia, and Colombia in Latin America; and Yemen in the Middle East lead national programs aimed at disease prevention, treatment, and surveillance. These efforts are usually managed by national ministries of health and focus on mass drug administration, public awareness, and strengthening local healthcare systems.

Support from donor countries has been essential in enabling these programs to function effectively. The United States, United Kingdom, Germany, Japan, and France are among the largest contributors, providing financial assistance, technical expertise, research funding, and overall support. Their contributions help ensure access to medicines, improve healthcare infrastructure, and support long-term disease control strategies in low-income and high-burden regions.

At the international level, the World Health Organisation (WHO) serves as the main coordinating body for global NTD efforts. The WHO develops international guidelines, sets global targets, and monitors progress through frameworks such as the WHO 2021–2030 NTD Roadmap. Other UN bodies also play important supporting roles. UNICEF contributes through child-focused health programs and improvements in water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH), while the World Bank provides financial and technical assistance aimed at strengthening national health systems and improving access to healthcare services.

Additionally, non-governmental organisations and charitable foundations play a significant role in implementing programs on the ground and supporting innovation. The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation is a major funder of NTD research and control initiatives. Pharmaceutical companies such as Merck, GSK, Pfizer, Johnson & Johnson, and Novartis also contribute through large-scale medicine donation programs, which provide essential treatments to millions of people each year. Together, they all form a broad international partnership that supports efforts to reduce the global burden of NTDs, although challenges remain in ensuring sustainable funding, coordination, and long-term success.

Timeline of Events

1946-1948 – Constitution of the World Health Organization (WHO): The Constitution of the WHO was adopted in 1946 and entered into force in 1948, establishing the WHO as the United Nations' specialized agency for international public health. It provided the legal and institutional foundation for global cooperation on disease prevention and control, including neglected tropical diseases.

1966 – International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR): The ICESCR recognized the right of everyone to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health. It required States Parties to take steps toward the prevention, treatment, and control of epidemic and endemic diseases, creating an important legal basis for addressing NTDs.

2000 – United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs): The MDGs were adopted to reduce poverty and improve global health outcomes. Although NTDs were not specifically named, they were indirectly addressed through goals related to health, poverty reduction, and access to basic services, helping to raise early awareness of neglected diseases.

2001 – World Health Assembly Resolution WHA54.19: The World Health Assembly called for intensified efforts to control and eliminate specific neglected diseases, including lymphatic filariasis, marking one of the first formal WHO resolutions focused on NTD-related action.

2012 – London Declaration on Neglected Tropical Diseases: The London Declaration represented a major global political commitment by governments, UN agencies, non-governmental organizations, and pharmaceutical companies to control, eliminate, or eradicate several NTDs. Although non-binding, it significantly increased coordination, funding, and international attention.

2013 – World Health Assembly Resolution WHA66.12: This resolution urged Member States to strengthen national programs and international cooperation to address neglected tropical diseases, reinforcing global commitments made under the London Declaration.

2015 – UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (SDG 3.3): The 2030 Agenda formally committed UN Member States to ending the epidemics of neglected tropical diseases by 2030 under Sustainable Development Goal 3.3, fully integrating NTDs into the global development agenda for the first time.

2020 – World Health Assembly Resolution WHA73.33: This resolution reaffirmed global commitment to ending NTDs and emphasized the importance of integrating NTD programs into primary healthcare systems and universal health coverage.

2021 – WHO Roadmap for Neglected Tropical Diseases 2021–2030: The WHO Roadmap was adopted as the main global framework guiding international and national efforts toward the prevention, control, elimination, and eradication of neglected tropical diseases by 2030.

2022 – Kigali Declaration on Neglected Tropical Diseases: The Kigali Declaration reinforced political commitment to achieving the 2030 targets, with a stronger focus on country leadership, sustainable financing, and long-term solutions.

Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue

Previous attempts to combat Neglected Tropical Diseases (NTDs) have included disease-specific programs, mass treatment campaigns, and wider public health efforts. Early international responses mainly focused on vertical programs that targeted individual diseases, such as river blindness and lymphatic filariasis. While these programs reduced disease levels in some areas, they often worked separately from national health systems and were difficult to maintain in the long term.

Over time, Mass Drug Administration (MDA) became a key strategy, allowing preventive medicines to be given to large at-risk populations, even if individuals did not show symptoms. These programs were often supported by pharmaceutical donation initiatives, which helped provide medicines at little or no cost to low-income countries. A major step forward came in 2012 with the London Declaration on Neglected Tropical Diseases, which brought together governments, international organisations, non-governmental organisations, and private companies to work toward shared goals, improving cooperation and increasing funding.

Other efforts mainly focused on prevention, including controlling disease-carrying insects, improving access to clean water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH), and educating communities on how diseases spread and how to seek treatment. In more recent years, NTD programs have been included within primary healthcare systems and universal health coverage plans, as outlined in the WHO 2021 - 2030 NTD Roadmap, to make responses more effective and sustainable.

Despite these efforts, progress has been uneven. Ongoing challenges such as limited funding, weak healthcare systems, conflict, population displacement, and the effects of climate change have continued to slow global efforts to control and eliminate NTDs.

Possible Solutions

Attempting to solve the problem of neglected tropical diseases requires medical, social, and policy approaches. One solution is expanding access to treatment through mass drug administration and local healthcare services as it will help reduce disease prevalence in affected communities. Additionally, strengthening health systems through better training for health workers, improved disease surveillance, and integration of NTD programs into primary healthcare - will help to make efforts more sustainable.

Prevention also plays a key role, because investments in clean water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH), along with vector control programs, can limit the spread of many NTDs. Another idea is Community education and awareness campaigns, which help ensure people understand how to prevent infection and seek treatment early.

Finally, the most essential is international cooperation. This includes increasing funding and technical support from donor countries and organisations, building public-private partnerships for medicine donations and research, and encouraging countries to share knowledge and resources to strengthen both regional and global responses.

Useful Links

1. [Neglected tropical diseases -- GLOBAL](#)
2. [Introduction to the special issue: challenges and opportunities in the fight against neglected tropical diseases: a decade from the London Declaration on NTDs - PMC](#)
3. [Ending the neglect to attain the Sustainable Development Goals: A road map for neglected tropical diseases 2021–2030](#)
4. [Endemic countries](#)
5. [Uniting to Combat NTDs](#)
6. [Water, sanitation and hygiene \(WASH\) | UNICEF](#)
7. [Goal 3 | Department of Economic and Social Affairs](#)

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