

WHY INVEST IN NEGLECTED TROPICAL DISEASES (NTDs)?





ABOUT UNITING TO COMBAT NEGLECTED TROPICAL DISEASES

We are a global advocacy organisation that exists to end neglected tropical diseases (NTDs) by mobilising resources in support of the World Health Organization's NTD road map and the Sustainable Development Goals.

We envision a world where no-one suffers from these preventable and treatable diseases.

We work with over 150 partners around the world to create the political will and an enabling environment for change to collectively address the NTD crisis. Together, we champion investment for NTDs.

We are 100% committed to ending NTDs.





WHY INVEST IN NEGLECTED TROPICAL DISEASES (NTDs)?

What are NTDs?

- Neglected tropical diseases (NTDs)^[1] are a group of preventable and treatable diseases that affect approximately **1.6 billion people** around the world.
- 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 cycles of poverty and cost developing nations billions of dollars every year.
- They are a **forgotten priority** in global development and health financing. Although NTDs are specifically mentioned in Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) target 3.3, alongside HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria, they do not benefit from the same level of prioritisation and resourcing.

The burden of NTDs globally

- NTDs exert an **unacceptable burden** on the world’s most vulnerable populations.
- In 2019, NTDs caused an estimated **200,000 deaths** and were responsible for **14.5 million disability-adjusted life years (DALYs)** (WHO Rationale for Investment in NTDs).



Uniting to Combat NTDs / Marcus Perkins

^[1] As defined by the World Health Organization (WHO), NTDs include: Buruli ulcer; Chagas disease; dengue and chikungunya; dracunculiasis (Guinea worm disease); echinococcosis; foodborne trematodiasis; human African trypanosomiasis (sleeping sickness); leishmaniasis; leprosy; lymphatic filariasis; mycetoma, chromoblastomycosis and other deep mycoses; onchocerciasis (river blindness); rabies; scabies and other ectoparasitoses; schistosomiasis (bilharzia); soil-transmitted helminthiasis (intestinal worms); snakebite envenoming; taeniasis/cysticercosis; trachoma; and yaws.



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- Many NTDs cause **severe pain and disability**. River blindness for example, affects 20.9 million people worldwide (Global Burden of Disease study, 2017), who may have symptoms such as severe itching, skin disfigurement and visual impairment. Lymphatic filariasis disfigures and can cause permanent disability and social stigmatization. Leprosy can cause chronic skin infection which could last 20 years or more.
- The burden of NTDs is **felt strongly in the African continent**. As of 2022, Nigeria alone accounts for nearly a tenth of the number of people requiring interventions for NTDs globally, that is, nearly 140 million people (WHO Global Health Observatory).

Progress against NTDs is a success story

- Investing in NTDs is a global development success story. As of October 2024, **54 countries have eliminated at least one NTD**. Eight of these countries were validated in 2022 alone, showing progress is possible.
- **African sleeping sickness** once decimated large populations in Africa, with close to as many as 40,000 cases per year in the late 1990s. Yet today, thanks to powerful partnerships, political will and innovation in diagnostics and treatment, there are fewer than 1,000 cases each year.
- There were an estimated 3.5 million cases of **Guinea worm disease** in the mid-1980s, this number has been reduced to just 15 new cases in 2021 in only four countries.
- In 2016 the WHO Regional Office for Africa created the Expanded Special Project for Elimination of Neglected Tropical Diseases (ESPEN) to accelerate eliminating NTDs in Africa by disseminating best practices, coordinating activities and offering technical guidance where needed. Thanks to coordinated efforts like this, as of October 2024, **22 of the 54 countries to have eliminated an NTD are in Africa** and Togo also became the first country to eliminate four NTDs in 2022.

Why invest?

- **An easy win**. When there are so many intractable issues in global health, investments in NTDs can offer wins for donors and for affected communities as many NTDs are preventable and treatable.
- **Return on investment (ROI)**. Interventions to prevent and control NTDs are one of the “best buys” in global public health, yielding an estimated net benefit to affected individuals of about US\$25 per US\$1 invested in preventive chemotherapy (WHO road map for NTDs 2021-2030).



WHY INVEST IN NEGLECTED TROPICAL DISEASES (NTDs)?

- **Compounding benefits.** Investing in NTD programmes creates a ripple effect in society. It leads to better education, health, and employment outcomes, and transforms lives and communities. It also helps to reduce gender inequity, stigma, and preventable mortality and morbidity.
- **Supporting livelihoods.** For individuals, it means a life without fear of being disabled or losing a livelihood from preventable disease.
- **It's simple.** Many NTD control measures rely on simple interventions that can be carried out by non-specialists, making community-based delivery possible ([WHO Rationale for Investment in NTDs](#)).

Potential economic returns

- **Productivity.** Some of the most prevalent NTDs, including lymphatic filariasis, river blindness, bilharzia and soil-transmitted helminthiases, are responsible for an average annualised **loss to productivity of about 29%** in people with these diseases compared to uninfected persons ([WHO Rationale for Investment in NTDs](#)). A recent study by Deloitte, commissioned by the END Fund, showed that Nigeria could gain approximately **\$19 billion in increased productivity** by meeting its 2030 elimination targets for NTDs.
- **Earning potential.** A study by Hamory et al. (2021) has shown that deworming school children can **raise future earning potential by up to 20%**.
- **Out-of-pocket expenditures and wages.** The economic cost of NTDs is high for affected households. The household income lost from out-of-pocket health expenditures and the wages lost due to NTDs is estimated to be at least **33 billion international dollars per year**. ([WHO Rationale for Investment in NTDs](#)).

Investing in NTDs benefits all Sustainable Development Goals

- **NTDs predominantly affect regions and populations with the greatest needs for development.** The link between tackling NTDs and development has been recognized through the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In 2016, NTDs were added into the SDG 3.3, as part of the epidemics to be ended by 2030.



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- Reducing the disease burden due to NTDs can also contribute to **alleviating poverty** (Goal 1) and **hunger** (Goal 2), **healthy lives and well-being for all** (Goal 3), promoting **quality education** (Goal 4), improving **gender equity** (Goal 5), **water and sanitation** for all (Goal 6), **reducing inequality** (Goal 10), **sustainable cities and communities, climate action, and life on land** (Goals 11, 13, 15). By building human capital, it will ultimately **contribute to economic growth** (Goal 8). Integrated approaches to NTD prevention and control inherently promote cross-sectoral **partnerships** (Goal 17).



- Investing in NTDs could mean **reductions in child mortality**. [A 2018 placebo-controlled study](#) in which twice yearly doses of azithromycin were administered to one group found that the rate of childhood mortality dropped by a combined 14 percent in the group across the three study countries in Sub-Saharan Africa.



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- Investing in NTDs can mean **investing in education and human capital**. A Foreign Affairs article showed how deworming benefits school attendance and long-term cognitive function. For example in Kenya, school absenteeism was reduced by as much as 20% and years were added to the duration of a child's education.
- Investing in NTDs means **investing in gender equity**. The burden of certain NTDs falls disproportionately on women and girls. For example, approximately 56 million girls and women in Sub-Saharan Africa are affected by female genital schistosomiasis (FGS), which increases risks of contracting HIV and HPV and threatens sexual and reproductive health (FGS Policy Brief).

A world more resilient to pandemics

- **NTD programmes strengthen institutions and catalyse lasting transformations in health systems**. Trusted community health workers and platforms developed over the years to track, prevent, diagnose and treat NTDs were essential to help fight COVID-19. NTD programmes also train local drug distributors and frontline health workers, bringing healthcare to some of the most remote parts of the world and playing a crucial role during disease outbreaks by virtue of their embeddedness in communities.
- COVID-19 and, more recently, the Mpox outbreak have also shown the critical importance of investing in strong public health systems that can both respond to endemic diseases like NTDs and make the **world more resilient to pandemics**.
- Investment in NTDs is fundamentally an **investment in health systems, universal health coverage (UHC), and in the resilience of communities**. When we have stronger health systems, and stronger communities, deadly but curable diseases have less room for manoeuvre. Populations and economies become more resilient, and this yields tangible benefits for people the world over, not only in NTD-endemic countries.

Progress against NTDs is stalling

- For some time, **a lack of resources** has been a significant barrier to the control, elimination, and eradication of NTDs.
- Last year marked the halfway point in the **SDG era but we are less than a third of the way toward the SDG 3.3 target** of a 90% reduction in the number of people requiring an intervention against NTDs. According to WHO's latest global NTD report, this figure was only at 25% in 2021.



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- Two diseases were targeted for eradication by 2030 in the [2021-2030 WHO road map for NTDs](#): yaws and Guinea worm disease. While significant progress has been made on Guinea worm disease, **eradication of yaws is worryingly off-track**.
- These challenges have been intensified by **COVID-19 which has caused severe delays and disruption to NTD programmes**, as well as a massive repurposing and diversion of resources and supply chain disruptions for NTD medicines and diagnostics. NTD services were the second most disrupted health services during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The development of diagnostics is a priority to ensure the WHO NTD road map targets are achieved. Notable advances have occurred in the development of rapid and multiplex diagnostic tests for certain NTDs but significant gaps remain. **Effective diagnostics will be of critical importance** as the intensity of infection and prevalence of NTDs progressively decrease and there is a risk that current methods of diagnosis may not have the necessary sensitivity or specificity to support programmes through to the point of target delivery ([WHO Global Report on NTDs 2023](#)).
- **Sustainable financing** is urgently needed to save lives now, get back on track, and ensure that past gains are not lost.

Investing in NTDs means investing in...

- Programmatic interventions, including the five interventions recommended by the WHO to combat NTDs:
 - Preventive chemotherapy and transmission control (PCT)
 - Innovative and intensified disease management (IDM)
 - Vector ecology and management
 - Safe water sanitation and hygiene (WASH)
 - Veterinary public health services
- Disease monitoring and surveillance
- Healthcare infrastructure and workforce
- Research and development
- Innovation
- Diagnostics
- Access and logistics
- Advocacy
- Multisectoral partnerships and action



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How to invest in NTDs

There are many ways to invest in NTDs. Investing in NTDs means contributing to:

- **WHO** and **Pooled Funding Mechanisms** like **ESPEN**.
- **Bilateral** and **multilateral** funding mechanisms.
- **NGOs** that implement programmatic interventions on the ground in countries around the world.
- **Advocacy** through the **Uniting to Combat NTDs Secretariat**, which works with countries, the WHO and 150+ partners using our global platform to advocate to end NTDs. This is our sole mission.
- **Cross-sectoral approaches**. Donors can identify existing development interventions that may benefit from integration, such as WASH programmes that may use NTD prevalence as tracers for access to WASH services.

Contact stuart@unitingtocombatntds.org to learn more about investing in NTDs.

A digital version of this brochure including data sources is available at <https://unitingtocombatntds.org/en/neglected-tropical-diseases/invest-in-neglected-tropical-diseases/> or please contact info@unitingtocombatntds.org



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