Neglected Tropical Diseases and the Post-2015 Development Agenda

Recommendation

To reduce human suffering, increase economic prosperity and achieve greater global equality for more than one billion people afflicted by neglected tropical diseases (NTDs) in the developing world, we urge all United Nations (UN) Member States and other stakeholders engaged in the post-2015 process to:

- Recognize that NTD control and elimination will significantly improve the health and economic productivity of the most marginalized communities, particularly when integrated with water and sanitation, nutrition, child and maternal health, and education initiatives.

- Ensure that the post-2015 framework includes specific goals and targets for NTDs.

“I share your view that poverty reduction and the elimination of NTDs go hand-in-hand.”

Mr. Ban Ki-moon
United Nations Secretary-General
October 2013

Overview

Neglected tropical diseases (NTDs) afflict the world’s poorest and most marginalized people, including over 800 million children. These diseases directly affect children’s nutrition status, school attendance, and cognitive and physical development; the health of pregnant women and their newborns; and increase the likelihood of contracting HIV.

Beyond health, NTDs undercut economic growth, educational achievement and gender equality. These diseases can prevent children from attending school and adults from working, and they disproportionately affect women and girls. However, NTDs receive only a small portion of global health funding and are not mentioned in the current Millennium Development Goals.
Treating NTDs is extremely cost-effective and can be easily integrated with other development initiatives. Through successful public-private partnerships, pharmaceutical companies donate nearly all of the drugs necessary to fight the seven most common NTDs: lymphatic filariasis, onchocerciasis, schistosomiasis, three soil transmitted helminths and trachoma. For approximately US $0.50 per person per year, we can treat and prevent these diseases and in turn improve nutrition, education, maternal and child health, and HIV outcomes, and set the stage for sustainable and inclusive economic growth.

As organizations dedicated to reducing the burden of NTDs, we applaud the UN Secretary-General’s High Level Panel for including recommended health goals for NTD control and elimination in its May 2013 final report on the post-2015 agenda and the release of the outcome document by the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development (see SDG 3: Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages), which also included NTDs. Successfully controlling and eliminating the most common NTDs requires a coordinated global effort and ensuring that NTDs remain on the next agenda is a critical step.

We urge government leaders and others to support the inclusion of health goals and targets for NTDs during Member State negotiations on the post-2015 development agenda.

"...There is no silver bullet remedy to helping a country break the cycle of poverty, but investing in the health of its population offers one of the best options for unlocking economic potential. With full support both from national governments and from the global community, we can...put an end to NTDs on the African continent [and beyond]."

His Excellency John A. Kufuor
President of Ghana (2001-2009) and NTD Special Envoy

**Links between NTDs and other Post-2015 Development Themes**

The impact of NTDs stretches across multiple development sectors, including water, sanitation and hygiene, nutrition, maternal and child health, and education. Long-term sustainable development, poverty reduction and improved health outcomes cannot be successfully achieved without simultaneously addressing NTDs.

For example, intestinal worm infections can be spread by drinking contaminated water and eating food that was not properly washed. Areas with stagnant water are breeding grounds for mosquitoes that transmit both lymphatic filariasis and malaria. In many communities, key water sources harbor the parasite that causes schistosomiasis. Many of these parasites consume key nutrients in their victims, diminishing the impact of food aid and nutrition programs. Whenever possible, water and sanitation and nutrition programs should integrate NTD control and elimination measures to maximize their impact.

Children in NTD endemic communities are often too sick to go to school or must stay home to care for an infected parent, limiting the success of education initiatives. II NTD infections lead to physical and cognitive stunting in children and anemia in children and pregnant women, weaken immune systems, and dilute the achievements of child and maternal health programs. Additionally, women who suffer from female genital schistosomiasis are three times more likely to contract HIV. III

**Beyond Human Capital: The Economic Impact of NTDs**

NTDs also cause significant economic challenges to endemic countries by trapping communities in a cycle of poverty. For example, chronic lymphatic filariasis can lead to a 15 percent annual loss in personal income, IV and
onchocerciasis forces farmers to abandon prime farmland out of fear of blindness, thus reducing agricultural output and perpetuating economic and social inequality.

Studies found that the wage earnings of Bangladeshi agricultural workers increased when consistently treated for NTDs, and in India, every US $1 invested in integrated NTD treatment results in an estimated economic return of at least US $20 per individual. A study on school-based deworming in Kenya demonstrated that the future earnings of treated children are up to 29 percent higher than their untreated counterparts.

Global Partnerships

The global fight against NTDs has made significant gains, but continuous universal support is critical to achieving lasting results. In 2012, global health leaders, including 13 major pharmaceutical companies, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the World Health Organization and endemic and donor countries issued the London Declaration on NTDs, an unprecedented global commitment to control or eliminate 10 NTDs by the end of this decade. Progress on the London Declaration goals continues to be made; however, significant financial and technical gaps remain and more resources are urgently needed to accelerate progress towards these goals.

Finally, in order to sustainably reduce extreme poverty, the primary risk factors for NTDs must be addressed, including access to clean water and sanitation, good hygiene, proper nutrition, vector control and strong health systems. Goals, targets and indicators for these development issues remain highly relevant to the ultimate control and elimination of NTDs, and their overlapping nature should be clearly stated in the final post-2015 development agenda.

Contact Information

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