

CONCEPT NOTE

ANNUAL MEETING OF NATIONAL NTD PROGRAMME MANAGERS IN THE WHO AFRICA REGION

“Stepping up County Ownership to Accelerate Programmatic Action”

29 November-1 December 2023

WHO/AFRO. Brazzaville, Republic of Congo

1. Introduction/Context

In early 2021, WHO unveiled the neglected tropical diseases (NTD) roadmap 2021-2030, signalling the start of a decade focused on controlling, eliminating, and eradicating NTDs. This timely roadmap emerged in the wake of disruptions caused by COVID-19, providing fresh impetus and drawing upon lessons learned from the pandemic. Despite the challenges, countries have continued to make progress, with ten countries successfully achieving validation or certification for the elimination of specific NTDs. Concurrently, the African Regional Committee endorsed the WHO/AFRO Tropical and Vector borne Diseases (TVD) strategic framework 2021-2025, while the ESPEN strategic framework 2021-2025 and the WHO strategic framework for the integration of skin NTDs were also introduced. As we reach the mid-term milestone in 2023, it offers an opportunity to review the accomplishments of the past three years, document noteworthy practices and lessons learned, and address encountered challenges. Furthermore, it necessitates intensified efforts and increased investments to counteract the adverse effects of delays and funding reductions, safeguard past achievements, and accelerate progress towards the targets outlined in the 2030 roadmap.

The accomplishments made in the past three years are truly noteworthy and warrant celebration. In 2021, the number of individuals requiring NTD interventions reduced by an estimated 80 million, representing a significant milestone. Moreover, ten countries have successfully eliminated NTDs as a public health problem: Benin, Cote d'Ivoire, Equatorial Guinea, Gambia, Ghana, Malawi, Mali, Rwanda, Togo, and Uganda. Notably, Equatorial Guinea, Ghana, Rwanda, and Uganda have obtained validation for the elimination of Human African trypanosomiasis (HAT) as a public health concern in 2022 and 2023, contributing to a total of seven HAT-validated countries. Furthermore, six countries have received validation for eliminating trachoma as a public health problem, including Ghana (June 2018), Gambia (April 2021), Togo (May 2022), Malawi (September 2022), Benin (May 2023), and Mali (May 2023).

Of significant importance, Togo has achieved a remarkable feat by becoming the first country in the WHO African region and globally to receive WHO validation for eliminating four NTDs, along with the certification for interrupting dracunculiasis transmission.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo, following Kenya in 2018, achieved certification as dracunculiasis-free in 2022, adding to the list of countries in the African region. This brings the total number of certified countries in the African region to 42, with only five Member States of the WHO in the African region remaining to be certified: Angola, Chad, Ethiopia, Mali, and South Sudan. In December 2020, Cameroon became the first yaws-endemic country in the African Region, out of the nine known endemic countries, to launch Total Community Treatment with azithromycin. This campaign aimed to reach at-risk populations of approximately 500,000 individuals, accelerating progress towards yaws eradication. The Central African Republic and Congo have subsequently implemented similar initiatives, increasing the number of countries adopting this approach to three by 2022.

Leprosy elimination as a public health problem has been accomplished and sustained in all countries within the WHO Africa region, except for the Comoros. However, significant efforts are still required to achieve the interruption of leprosy transmission by 2023, in line with the targets set by the new NTDs roadmap. Positive trends have been observed for Buruli ulcers, with reported cases decreasing from 2,101 in 2014 to 1,370 in 2021, and for visceral Leishmaniasis, with reported cases decreasing from 11,119 in 2014 to 3,825 in 2021, across the WHO Africa region. Additionally, the Regional Office has been providing technical and financial support to countries in developing their integrated NTD master plans.

The progress achieved in recent years and the accelerated efforts to meet elimination targets underscore the importance of country ownership and the necessity to maintain accessible NTD services through people-centred innovation. These advancements highlight the strengthening of NTD integration, cross-sector collaboration, and mainstreaming, which contribute to enhanced country ownership and accountability. Consequently, the issue of investment becomes crucial.

The significant progress made on the eradication, elimination and control of NTDs is an ongoing global effort which is a result of strong partnership of the NTD community including drug manufacturers, funding donors, multilateral organizations, Non-governmental organizations, implementing partners, academia and research institutes, Continental and Regional bodies, national governments, civic societies, volunteers, the youth group, the community, etc.

At this critical juncture, the Regional TVD Programme and the Expanded Special Project for the Elimination of NTDs (ESPEN) would like to convene the **Annual Regional NTD Programme Managers meeting**. This background document outlines the terms of reference for this significant gathering.

2. Why the meeting is so important for AFRO? Impact to Public Health

NTDs are already neglected in various aspects, and recently, funding for NTDs has become significantly challenging. This situation is likely to hinder our ability to achieve the targets outlined in the Global NTD Framework and make a meaningful contribution to the attainment of Sustainable Development Goal 3.3. It is crucial that we urgently intensify advocacy efforts to secure resources and review current national plans to realign and prioritize activities that will have a more positive impact on public health. Furthermore, country ownership and mobilization of domestic funding empower countries to address NTDs in a sustainable, targeted, and accountable manner. It enables them to allocate resources according to their specific needs, engage local communities, and strengthen health systems. This holistic approach is essential for long-term success in the fight against neglected tropical diseases.

The purpose of this meeting is to provide guidance and cross-learning through guided panel discussions and data sharing, to accelerate the implementation progress of the WHO NTD Roadmap 2021-2030 in the WHO African Region. It aims to discuss the obstacles encountered and identify opportunities to enhance country ownership and mobilize increased resources, including local funding, for NTDs. Given that the recently developed national NTD Master Plans reflect country ownership and align with the first milestone of the NTD Roadmap in 2023, this meeting serves as an opportune moment to review and explore innovative approaches for implementing the National master plans. The agenda has been designed to address this crucial aspect.

3. Objectives and Expected outcomes

3.1. General objective

The general objective of the meeting is to review the progress of the National NTD programmes since the launch of the WHO NTD Roadmap in 2021, alignment of the National NTD Master Plans with the WHO NTD Roadmap 2021-2030, **discuss challenges, share experiences and opportunities, formulate recommendations, and propose solutions** for promoting **stronger country ownership for accelerating programmatic action.**, in line with WHO NTD roadmap Companion Document on Sustainability Framework 2021-2030.

This meeting will serve as a platform for countries to evaluate their achievements in relation to the NTD Roadmap 2021 – 2030 using the WHO global annual reporting form (GARF) tool and to exchange knowledge and best practices. By reviewing the progress made, participants can identify areas that require improvement and share strategies for overcoming challenges. The meeting will also provide an opportunity to strengthen country ownership, ensuring that national programs take the lead in implementing NTD interventions and driving progress towards the roadmap targets.

The desired outcome of the meeting is to generate concrete recommendations and solutions that will enhance country ownership and accelerate the implementation of NTD programs through cross-learning and sharing best practices. By fostering collaboration, knowledge sharing, and collective problem-solving, the meeting aims to empower countries to take ownership of their NTD initiatives, prioritize actions, and mobilize resources effectively.

3.2. Specific objectives

- 1) Share experiences, opportunities and challenges in the implementation of the WHO road map and NTD master plans (impact of the interventions using the NTD Heatmap, the preventive chemotherapy NTDs Joint application package (JAP), Trachoma elimination monitoring form (TEMF), CM NTD report, etc.)
- 2) Provide technical updates and innovations from WHO and progressed countries on integration, resource mobilisation and mainstreaming of NTD interventions within national health systems.
- 3) Highlight strategies to strengthen country ownership - and mechanisms for ensuring effective coordination and collaboration
- 4) Support operational planning of NTD work at country level in line with the Global NTD roadmap and regional framework for integrated control, elimination and eradication of tropical and vector borne diseases.

3.3. Expected outcomes

- experiences, opportunities and challenges in the implementation of the WHO road map and NTD master plans shared
- Technical updates and innovations on integration, resource mobilisation and mainstreaming of NTD interventions within national health systems presented
- Strategies to strengthen country ownership and mechanisms for ensuring effective coordination and collaboration are adopted
- Operational plans and funding gaps for focus countries are available

4. Method of work

Plenary sessions, presentations, and break-out group discussions to clarify progress, gaps, challenges, and way forward.

- ✓ **Day 1: First three years since the launch of WHO NTD Roadmap 2021 – 2030: progress made towards the control and elimination of NTDs and challenges.**

- NTD Roadmap 2021-2030: renewed disease specific targets and regional 2023 mid-term updates- by disease
 - Enhancing coordination between NTD country programmes: Kikundi Community of Practice (CoP)
 - Progress made by NTD control programmes in the African region (*max 3 slides by country showing major breakthroughs and progress towards control and elimination of NTDs*).
 - NTD resources, stakeholder mapping and funding gaps
 - Country experience on NTD Programme ownership, coordination, and domestic funding
- ✓ **Day 2: Operationalizing current NTD Master plans and new tools for an enhanced monitoring of progress towards the completion of WHO NTD Roadmap goals**
- Operationalizing National NTD Master Plans: key elements to ensure the completion of developed Master Plans
 - Existing and new tools to monitor progress on WHO NTD Roadmap indicators
 - Role of national and international partners: functioning of in-country coordination mechanisms (*max 5 min pre-recorded presentations*)
 - Operational plans for integrating and mainstreaming interventions towards the control and elimination of NTDs: sharing country experience.
 - Major challenges for operationalizing National NTD Master Plans by selected countries.
- ✓ **Day 3: Cross-cutting issues, integration, and mainstreaming**
- Integration of interventions and monitoring and evaluation (M&E) activities under the WHO NTD Roadmap 2021 – 2030: WASH, vector control and integration of M&E and control interventions across NTDs and within other health programmes
 - Learning from country experience on the integration of NTD interventions.
 - Challenges and opportunities for cross-cutting interventions and integration.

5. Dates and place

Dates: 29 November -1 December 2023 (in-person, Brazzaville)

6. Languages

English, French, and Portuguese will be the medium of the meeting and simultaneous translation will be provided.

7. Participants

All NTD stakeholders working in or for Africa including Ministry of Health NTD Programme Managers as primary participants, WHO Country Office NTD Focal Points, NTD donors and implementing partners, experts, scientists and the preventive chemotherapy and case management NTD - Regional Programme Review Group (RPRG) Chairs

- National NTD Programme Managers
- WHO NTD staff at HQ, AFRO, EMRO and WCO in Africa region, including 5 countries in WHO/EMRO that are under ESPEN umbrella, namely Algeria, Egypt, Djibouti, Somalia, Sudan, and Yemen.
- WHO/AFRO aligned units: non-communicable diseases, vector-borne diseases, malaria, Medicines supply, health Infrastructure, equipment Maintenance including Health Technologies, Medicines and Traditional Medicines (MIM) and Health Financing and Investment (HFI), Violence, Injuries and Disabilities (VID) including Rehabilitation (UHP), epidemic preparedness and response (EPR), antimicrobial resistance (AMR), integrated service delivery (ISD) and primary health care (PHC).
- NTD donors and implementing partners (ESPEN,20 and CM-NTD,10)
- NTD RPRG co-chairs
- Mwele Malecela Mentorship Programme mentees

8. Working documents and references

Reference documents

1. WHO NTD Roadmap 2021-2030 and companion documents
2. WHO/AFRO TVD Strategic Framework 2022-2030
3. ESPEN Annual report 2022
4. UCN Regional report, 2022
5. NTD Global report 2023