

# ESPEN

THE EXPANDED SPECIAL PROJECT  
FOR ELIMINATION OF  
NEGLECTED TROPICAL DISEASES





# WHAT ARE NTDs?

Neglected tropical diseases (NTDs) are a group of twenty infectious diseases that are prevalent among populations living in poverty and without adequate access to clean water and sanitation. NTDs cause blindness, painful disfigurement and long-term disabilities and kill more than 500,000 people per year plunging communities into endless cycles of poverty and creating obstacles to human and economic development.

## THE NTD BURDEN

- ▶ **1,5 billion people** are affected by NTDs worldwide.
- ▶ About **40% of the global NTD burden** occurs in Africa.
- ▶ Only **0.6% of global healthcare funding** goes to controlling NTDs.
- ▶ People suffering from NTDs have a higher risk of acquiring or dying from COVID-19 or other infectious (e.g. HIV/AIDS, TB, malaria) and non-communicable diseases.
- ▶ Women and children face the biggest threat of NTDs through socio-cultural and biological factors.

## MASS DRUG ADMINISTRATION (MDA)

MDA is a strategy consisting of a campaign-style approach to deliver preventive chemotherapy (PC) treatments to vulnerable and at-risk communities, usually once or twice a year.

Thanks to the pharmaceutical sector's drug donation program (to date donated drugs worth more than US \$17,8 billion), large-scale integrated treatment of people in high risk areas costs less than US \$0.50 per patient per year to administer making it one of the best buys in global health.



## WHAT IS ESPEN?

The Expanded Special Project for Elimination of Neglected Tropical Diseases (ESPEN) was established in May 2016 in the spirit of public-private partnership between the WHO Regional Office for Africa (AFRO), African Member States, Pharmaceutical companies and NTD partners in an effort to mobilize political, technical and financial resources to accelerate the elimination of the five most prevalent NTDs - lymphatic filariasis, onchocerciasis, soil-transmitted helminthiasis, schistosomiasis and trachoma - that can be prevented and treated through Mass Drug Administration of donated medicines, complemented by water, sanitation and hygiene interventions. These are recognized as the most cost-effective elimination strategies against NTDs.

ESPEN supports improved access to and effective use of safe, efficient preventive treatment, a robust accessible global system for data collection, enabling evidence-based planning and decision-making.

## MISSION

Accelerate the elimination of NTDs to protect 600 million people in Africa.

## VISION

African people free of NTDs.

# PROGRESS ON THE 5 MOST COMMON NTDS

ACCOUNTING FOR UP TO 90% OF THE NTD BURDEN IN AFRICA



## LYMPHATIC FILARIASIS (LF) | ALSO KNOWN AS ELEPHANTIASIS

At the start of ESPEN in 2016, there were 371 million estimated people requiring preventive therapy against LF. By 2019 that number has declined to 339 million people in 32 countries. Togo successfully eliminated LF as a public health problem in 2017, followed by Malawi in 2020.



## ONCHOCERCIASIS | ALSO KNOWN AS RIVER BLINDNESS

The reported number of people treated for onchocerciasis increased with 15% from 132 million in 2016 to 152 million in 2019 in the African region.



## SCHISTOSOMIASIS | ALSO KNOWN AS BILHARZIA

The reported number of people treated for schistosomiasis increased with 130% from 36 million in 2012 to 83 million in 2019 in the African region.



## SOIL-TRANSMITTED HELMINTHIASIS | HOOKWORM, WHIPWORM, ROUNDWORM

The reported number of people treated for soil-transmitted helminthiasis increased with 193% from 76 million in 2012 to 223 million in 2019 in the African region.



## TRACHOMA | LEADING CAUSE OF PREVENTABLE BLINDNESS GLOBALLY

People requiring treatment against trachoma decreased from 171 million in 2016 to 117 million in 2020.

## ESPEN STRATEGIC PRIORITIES



### SCALING UP MDA TO ACHIEVE 100% GEOGRAPHIC AND EFFECTIVE COVERAGE

Leaving no one behind and securing access to treatment.



### SCALING DOWN MDA TOWARD PC-NTD ELIMINATION AND REDUCTION OF MORBIDITY DUE TO NTDS

Supporting countries to stop treatment and obtain WHO validation as soon as elimination is reached.



### STRENGTHENING INFORMATION SYSTEMS FOR EVIDENCE-BASED, IMPLEMENTATION LEVEL DECISION-MAKING

High-quality data sharing tools, the ESPEN Portal and the ESPEN Collect, have been created to help African governments in their decision-making.



### PROMOTE EFFECTIVE USE OF DONATED MEDICINES

Ensuring that all donated tablets are procured and distributed in a timely manner and without wastage and any unutilized drugs are appropriately stored and repurposed.

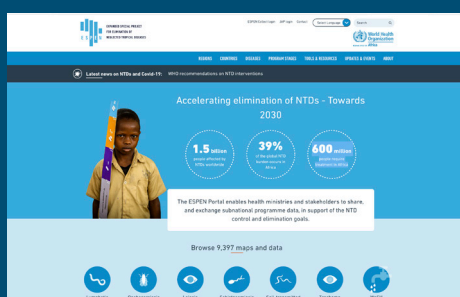


### ENHANCING COUNTRY OWNERSHIP AND HEALTH-SYSTEM STRENGTHENING (HSS) FOR SUSTAINABILITY

The partnership helps governments to develop and implement national strategic plans against NTDS, and empowers countries to take greater leadership in financing their own development.

## THE ESPEN PORTAL

[HTTP://ESPEN.AFRO.WHO.INT](http://ESPEN.AFRO.WHO.INT)



ESPEN has developed the first ever continental online atlas with close to 10,000 maps, **the ESPEN Portal**, for infectious diseases in Africa, which contains disaggregated subnational level information up to community level. Via this online platform, 45 countries openly share data on historical and contemporary distribution of NTDS, including disease specific epidemiological surveys, treatment coverage and other programmatic data.





# UNIVERSAL HEALTH COVERAGE (UHC)

Health systems strengthening and a coordinated approach to fight infectious diseases are the most successful ways to achieve sustainable impact leading to better health through improvements in access, coverage, quality and efficiency.

ESPEN was recognized as a ground-breaking public-private partnership and received the UHC Innovative Partnership Award at the 2018 UHC UNGA conference in New York.

“NTDs are a very important part of our fight in the global health agenda. Elimination of NTDs is the milestone to achieve UHC.”

Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus  
World Health Organisation, Director General

”

NTDs community-based interventions ensure nobody is left behind

Building capacity for African Ministries of Health strengthens their health systems and provides the NTD quality services populations deserve

No out of pocket expenditure is needed when accessing donated NTD medicines



EXPANDED SPECIAL PROJECT  
FOR ELIMINATION OF  
NEGLECTED TROPICAL DISEASES



Equity  
in access

Quality of  
health services

Financial risk  
protection

Universal Health Coverage

For any questions and comments

please contact ESPEN's Team Leader,  
Dr. Maria Rebollo Polo at [rebolopolom@who.int](mailto:rebolopolom@who.int)



World Health  
Organization  
REGIONAL OFFICE FOR  
Africa



EXPANDED SPECIAL PROJECT  
FOR ELIMINATION OF  
NEGLECTED TROPICAL DISEASES