



ELIMINATING NTDS IN THE AFRICAN REGION

WHO in an era of transformation



Fighting on all fronts

2015–2021

- ✓ **1.3 billion treatments** administered for lymphatic filariasis
- ✓ **Over 23 million more people no longer require treatment** for onchocerciasis, up from 8 million
- ✓ **548 million treated** for schistosomiasis; 454 million children and 94 million adults
- ✓ **Up to 959 million people treated** for soil-transmitted helminthiasis; 93% (892 million) school age children
- ✓ **Over 30% MDA improvement** for trachoma; increased to 65% from 35% between 2015–2021

Neglected Tropical Diseases (NTDs) eliminated as a public health problem in countries

Lymphatic filariasis:

- ✓ **Togo 2017**
- ✓ **Malawi 2020**

Trachoma:

- ✓ **Ghana 2018**
- ✓ **Malawi 2022**
- ✓ **Gambia 2021**
- ✓ **Benin 2023**
- ✓ **Togo 2022**
- ✓ **Mali 2023**

ESPEN: Paradigm shift in the battle against NTDS

After re-evaluating myriad challenges and lessons learned over the years, an unprecedented partnership was established in 2016 to mitigate some of these hurdles, and accelerate the fight against NTDS on the African continent. Against this background, ESPEN was born as a public-private partnership, established by WHO, to assist African countries reduce the burden of NTDS, and work towards their elimination.

ESPEN coordinates the partnership, stakeholders and work to optimize the value of government and partner investments. The battle towards NTD elimination relies on country ownership, with ESPEN providing operational and technical support to endemic countries.

ESPEN also mobilizes political, financial and technical resources to accelerate the control and elimination of these diseases, targeting the five most prevalent NTDS in Africa which impose the greatest burden on countries. These are lymphatic filariasis (LF), onchocerciasis (ONCHO), soil-transmitted helminthiasis (STH), schistosomiasis (SCH) and trachoma (TRA).

Walking into the future on a solid foundation

Since its establishment, ESPEN has provided operational and financial support to endemic countries. WHO, through ESPEN, has intervened in the following areas:

✓ **Provided funding support to countries for NTD control and elimination:**

ESPEN disbursed over US\$ 60 million to more than 33 countries between 2017–2020, based on requirements and levels of planned activities for implementation.

✓ **Improved health information systems:**

Launched an electronic portal in 2017 and continued to add useful features, including ESPEN Collect, utilized by countries for survey data collection and analysis, and the JAP tool for streamlining information to improve effectiveness and management of medicines supply chains.

✓ **Supported strengthening of health systems capacity:**

Nudged countries towards a coordinated and integrated approach, and encouraged country ownership of the battle against NTDs for sustainability.

✓ **Provided technical assistance:**

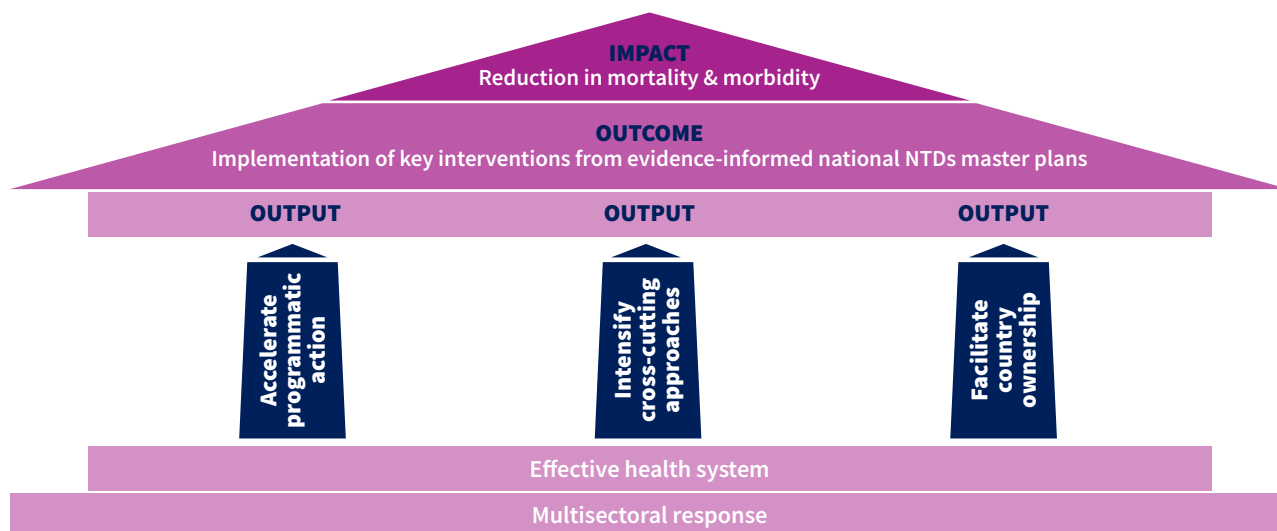
Provided technical assistance to 44 countries for development and implementation of annual national action plans and country NTD master plans. ESPEN has trained more than 1000 health workers, including over 400 in more than 20 countries trained to use ESPEN Collect.

✓ **Reinvigorated supply chain management:**

Developed and deployed three tools: Joint Application Package (JAP), Country Integrated NTD Database (CIND) and Data Quality Assessment (DQA), to help coordinate applications from countries for medicines, treatments, and supply chain management.

Road map to elimination of NTDs in 2030

Despite the significant progress, the burden of NTDs remains immense. In the runup to the set target date for elimination by 2030, success will hinge on three key pillars.



Future strategies – Integrated approach required for success built on three pillars to support efforts to control, eliminate and eradicate NTDs

Source: Modified from WHO GMP 2020

“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, WHO Director-General

Recipe for success:

Country ownership and strong political will in Togo

Country ownership and strong political will are two essential ingredients required to win the battle against NTDs in the region. They are vital for progress and sustainability of progress achieved, and for the continuity of the future struggle against NTDs in the region.

Through years of experience in fighting NTDs, WHO has known these facts. As a result, ESPEN has been championing advocacy efforts since the start of operations. Several countries are yet to take complete country ownership, but among the few who have is one notable example. Results from the Togolese government tell the story: three NTDs eliminated and one eradicated in a short period, with three in the last six years (2017–2022).



Acknowledgment letter given by WHO Director General and WHO Regional Director for Africa to Togo's Minister of Health, for elimination of trachoma as a public health problem in 2022, at the 75th World Health Assembly.

Photo credit: Togo NTD programme

This was largely attributed to country ownership and political will to sustain the effort. The political will was what provided the initial impetus, prompting the development of a master plan for the fight against NTDs. A dedicated budget for NTDs, coupled with increased financial contributions from the government and commitment of other stakeholders, followed.

Togo has taken complete ownership of its fight against NTDs. It has encouraged strong community engagement and participation, resulting in the elimination of several NTDs. It has also assumed a more active role in crafting its own programme. Togo adopted WHO's guidelines and recommendations to deliver and evaluate its NTD programmes, engaging local communities for implementation of interventions. This increased leadership role was a critical element in steering the country towards success.

“Togo has achieved a major feat by becoming the first country in Africa to eliminate four neglected tropical diseases.”

Dr Matshidiso Moeti, WHO Regional Director for Africa

Acknowledgements

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