



MINISTRY OF HEALTH

Office of the Director General: Tel: +256-414-340873 Fax: +256-41-4231584 Email: info@health.go.ug

PRESS RELEASE

Uganda joins the rest of the world to mark World Neglected Tropical Diseases Day 2021 by launching its Program Sustainability Plan 2020-2025

From the year 2020, 30th January of every year was designated as World NTD Day and also the anniversary of the landmark 2012 London Declaration on NTDs, which unified partners across sectors, countries, and disease communities to push for greater investment and deliberate action on NTDs. The World NTD Day does not only honour this incredible show of support but is intended to inspire and rally advocates, community leaders, health experts and policymakers working across the diverse NTD landscape and align behind the common goal to #EndtheNeglect and #BeatNTDs for good, and for all.

Uganda has made tremendous progress towards the control and elimination of Neglected Tropical Diseases (NTDs). Trachoma, Lymphatic Filariasis and Onchocerciasis are targeted for elimination by the year 2025. Challenges remain with Schistosomiasis, Kala Azar and Soil Transmitted Helminths among Preventive Chemotherapy NTDs especially in some of the hard-to-reach areas of the country with low access to water and sanitation facilities. Other challenges are cross border transmission of diseases by vectors and influx of refugees from neighbouring countries which are still endemic.

The Uganda Ministry of Health through the NTD Control Program (NTDCP) has led tremendous progress towards World Health Organisation (WHO) elimination and control goals for NTDs. The country's most significant NTD achievements include the elimination of Guinea worm, the interruption of onchocerciasis transmission in 31 out of 43 endemic districts. It is also projected that lymphatic filariasis (LF) and trachoma — two of the most common NTDs — are on track to be eliminated by 2025.

The Ministry of Health NTD Control Program has received financial and technical support from different partners over the years. Currently, the program is receiving support from WHO, USAID through the Act to End NTDs I East project implemented by Research Triangle Institute (RTI) International; The Carter Center, Sight Savers, DfID through ASCEND project, Schistosomiasis Control Initiative (SCI), and Korean government through World vision among others. The financial and technical support provided by all the partners have enabled the NTD control program achieve the results indicated above. WHO has continued to provide technical guidance and provision of some medicines like Praziquantel (PZQ) for schistosomiasis treatment?

This year, the Ministry of Health has partnered with RTI International and other NTD implementing partners to raise critical awareness about sustainable NTD programming in Uganda through launching the Uganda NTD Control Program Sustainability Plan 2020-2025 on Thursday 4th February 2021.

Recognizing prior investments in sustainable NTD programming in Uganda, the Ministry of Health with support from USAID's Act to End

NTDs|East Project developed the Uganda NTD Control Program Sustainability Plan 2020 -2025. This is the first of its kind to be developed and provides a framework for investing in the health system building blocks that will enable sustainable NTD program implementation especially of core elements of the program like strengthening collaboration and coordination within the health sector and across sectors. The Ministry of Health is therefore pleased to launch the NTD Control Program Sustainability Plan 2020–2025 as part of the activities to mark the World NTD Day.

The launch event will involve sharing and highlighting priority areas that require urgent and sustained attention by government and NTD program stakeholders, at the same time providing an opportunity for engagement with key stakeholders on the importance of multi-sectoral collaboration and coordination in sustaining the achievement recorded so far and working towards the elimination goals.

Sustaining the achievements recorded so far is critical and will require a multi sectoral effort considering the factors making communities susceptible to infection with NTDs like Schistosomiasis and soil transmitted helminths. Uganda still has one of the highest burdens of these diseases in the world with poor and rural communities most vulnerable.

By incorporating NTD priorities into routine government planning, implementation and monitoring, Uganda will lay the foundation for the long-term control and elimination of these diseases. To demonstrate its commitment to this plan and to the fight against NTDs generally, the government of Uganda has committed to increasing national funding for NTDs from 12% to 30% by 2025.

To achieve sustainability objectives, strong partnerships with other sectors, development partners, civil society organisations, and affected communities will be needed. Among the key government partners in this effort are other ministries such as Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES); Ministry of Water and Environment (MoWE); Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development (MoGLSD); Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development (MoFPED); and Ministry of Local Government (MoLG) where grass root implementation takes place.

The fight against NTDs will remain a top priority of the Ministry of Health until every Ugandan can live healthy and productive lives free from neglected tropical diseases.

Dr. Henry Mwebesa
Director General of Health Services

Ministry of Health launches sustainable efforts to end NTDs in Uganda

BY PAUL MURUNGI
editorial@ug.nationmedia.com

Today, Uganda joins the rest of the world to mark the Neglected Tropical Diseases (NTDs) Day.

This day provides global health advocates and global citizens an opportunity to learn more about NTDs and call upon the government to own the programmes by increasing funding to sustain the gains.

According to Dr Alfred Mubangizi, the Assistant Commissioner (Vector borne and NTDs), this year's NTD Day will focus on raising awareness and rally the general public behind the urgent need to end NTDs in Uganda.

World Health Organisation (WHO) statistics indicate that NTDs continue to cause havoc worldwide affecting more than 1 billion people.

Primarily, poor populations living in tropical and subtropical climates have been affected. NTDs infections are caused by unsafe water, poor housing conditions and poor sanitation.

Children are the most vulnerable to these diseases, which kill, impair or permanently disable millions of people every year, often resulting in life-long physical pain and social stigmatization.

However, everyone is susceptible to NTDs as long as you are exposed to the organisms that transmit any of them.

WHO identifies some of the NTDs as dengue, rabies, blinding trachoma, Buruli ulcer, endemic treponematoses (yaws), leprosy (Hansen disease), Chagas disease, human African trypanosomiasis (sleeping sickness), leishmaniasis, cysticercosis, dracunculiasis (guinea-worm disease), echinococcosis, foodborne trematode infections, lymphatic filariasis, onchocerciasis (river blindness), schistosomiasis (bilharziasis), soil-transmitted helminthiasis (intestinal worms).

Uganda's tropical climate has put at least 37 million of the country's population at a high risk of acquiring NTDs. However, significant progress has been made to eliminate NTDs with



Dr Alfred Mubangizi
Assistant Commissioner
Vector borne and NTDs



Benjamin Binagwa
Chief of Party
RTI International

more than 242 million cumulative treatments provided and drugs worth \$1.5b (Shs 5.5 trillion) have been donated.

Mr Benjamin Binagwa, the Chief of Party at RTI International, says the current state of NTDs presents a position of hope that Uganda will meet its control and elimination goals by 2030.

He says currently, trachoma is active in only three out of the 51 districts that were previously endemic. Lymphatic Filariasis is currently under surveillance using transmission assessment surveys following cessation of mass drug administration in over 60 endemic districts.

Onchocerciasis (River blindness) treatment has been stopped in 31 districts out of the 43 districts that were endemic with more than 2.5 million people protected from the disease. Schistosomiasis remains a problem in more than 90 districts that have water bodies infested with Schisto causing snails.

However, soil transmitted helminths like roundworms, hookworms, whip worms remain prevalent in the entire country.

With support from USAID and partners, the Ministry of Health has registered a significant progress in combating NTDs attaining 100 percent geographical coverage for treatment of NTDs in all endemic districts.



MoH-VCD team testing children for LF during Lymphatic filariasis epidemiological surveillance in Abim district

"All districts that have been mapped and found to have NTDs have been reached with preventive chemotherapy. This has led to a significant reduction in prevalence of some of these diseases like trachoma, LF and Oncho," Mr Binagwa says.

Achievements

Mr Mubangizi says some of the key achievements Uganda has registered include eradicating guinea worm in 2009 and since then, the Ministry of Health has been conducting surveillance to prevent re introduction of disease from neighboring countries which are still endemic.

There has also been treatment coverage for onchocerciasis reaching all endemic communities in 43 districts, attaining at least 80 per cent coverage of the total population in many targeted communities. Disease transmission has been interrupted in 31 districts where Mass Drug Administration (MDA) has been stopped, protecting a population of 2.7 million people.

MDA coverage for Lymphatic Filariasis which was scaled up to all the current 63 endemic districts in 2010 has been stopped saving a population at risk of over 17 million.

New reports indicate that hydrocele cases are now rarely reported among the young generation below 30 years, while Hydrocele surgery and elephantiasis management has been initiated in 9 of the 63 districts leading to the reduction of Hydrocele in some of these districts to 90 percent.

Sustainability

To sustain the achievements made in combating NTDs in the country. This year, the Ministry of Health has partnered with RTI International and other NTD implementing partners to raise critical awareness about sustainable NTDs programming in Uganda through launching the Uganda NTDs Control Program



One of the senior trachoma graders examines a child for active trachoma during a field survey in Isingiro district

Sustainability Plan 2020 -2025.

The USAID Act to End Neglected Tropical Diseases | East was launched in 2019 as a new global programme working to strengthen countries' abilities to control and eliminate NTDs, with RTI leading the consortium implementing the programme.

Dr Henry Mwebesa, the Director General of Health Services, says to make recognition of prior investments in sustainable NTDs programming, the Ministry of Health with support from USAID's Act to End NTDs | East Project developed the Uganda NTD Control Program Sustainability Plan 2020 -2025. To demonstrate its commitment to this plan and to the fight against NTDs generally, the government of Uganda has committed to increasing national funding for NTDs from 12 percent to 30 percent by 2025.

This is the first of its kind to be developed and provides a framework for investing in the health system building blocks that will enable sustainable NTDs programme implementation especially of core elements of the program like strengthening collaboration and coordination within the health sector and across sectors.

The four cross cutting approaches for the project includes; the integration among NTDs that is joint delivery of interventions that are common to severe diseases, mainstreaming NTD services at the facility level through improved diagnostic ability, training and inclusion into the essential service package; and close coordination and multi- sectoral action within and beyond health including vector Control, Water and sanitation, Environmental Health and Education.

"Sustaining the achievements recorded so far is critical and will require a multi sectoral effort considering the factors making communities susceptible to infection with NTDs like Schistosomiasis and soil transmitted helminths. Uganda still has one of the highest burdens of these diseases in the world with poor and rural communities being most vulnerable," Dr Mwebesa says.

With key partnerships, the fight against NTDs continues to remain a top priority of the Ministry of Health until every Ugandan can live healthy and productive lives free from neglected tropical diseases.

#Face NTDs: End the Neglect#

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