

The Power of Integration: achieving the control and elimination of neglected tropical diseases

Meeting Report

This side event is brought together key stakeholders from the international development community to discuss ways integrated and cross-sectoral approaches can play a key role to the control and elimination of neglected tropical diseases. Participants were encouraged to share best practices and implementation strategies that might be helpful to endemic country governments and development partners.

Panellists

- Chair: Dr Maria Neira, Director, Public Health and the Environment Department, WHO
- Prof Onyebuchi Chukwu, Minister of Health, Nigeria
- Dr Bridget Okoeguale, Director of Public Health, Nigeria
- Dr Dirk Engels, Director, Dept of Control of NTDs, WHO
- Nichola Cadge, Health Adviser, DFID
- Dr Ariel Pablos-Mendez, Assistant Administrator for Global Health, USAID
- Dr Wendy Harrison, Chair, UK Coalition against NTDs

Key themes/messages

- The need for cross-sectoral collaboration with a significant emphasis placed on water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) collaboration
- The power of NTDs as indicators of poverty
- The importance of focussing on social and environmental determinants of health
- The transition of developing economies to MICs and national ability to tackle NTD elimination
- The importance of effective M&E, demonstrating impact of interventions

Opening statement

The Nigerian Minister of Health, Prof Onyebuchi Chukwu, opened the session and outlined the importance of NTD control to the Nigerian Ministry of Health. At the conclusion of each speaker statement, the Chair, Dr Maria Neira from WHO summarised the comments from each speaker and linked what was said to the integration theme.

Dr Neira acknowledged that the WASH community would be happy to contribute and cited links between adequate WASH interventions and trachoma elimination as an important example of collaboration between the sectors.

Dr Bridget Okoeguale, Director of Public Health, Nigeria

Dr Okoeguale's contributions began with a call to action of the WASH sector, emphasising the importance of wider cross-sectoral collaboration, including the departments responsible for Environment, Water, Education, Housing and Media. She underlined the global role that stakeholders play in NTD elimination in partnership and noted that no stakeholder can rest until elimination has been reached.

She cited the development of a joint malaria and lymphatic filariasis (LF) campaign in Nigeria as an important example of integration between NTD programmes and other mass distribution programmes. Nigeria was the first country to use community-directed treatment with Ivermectin for LF as a platform for other health interventions. She also emphasised the importance of embedding NTD care within the Primary health care structure.

Dr Neira reminded the participants of the core function of public health, not simply therapeutic approaches to care but the primary prevention and addressing root causes.

Dr Dirk Engels, Director, Dept of Control of NTDs, WHO

Dr Engels' contributions focussed on the sustainability of NTD interventions and outlined what WHO and the NTD department are doing to promote sustainability of NTD interventions.

He promoted the five public health strategies needed to prevent, control, eliminate and eradicate NTDs:

- Preventative chemotherapy
- Disease (morbidity, disability) management
- Vector/host control
- Veterinary public health
- Hygiene behaviour change and provision of improved WASH

Dr Engels then explained how the WHO NTD department's focus has been on the first two of these five as these were the most urgent in terms of the relief of burden. Also, advice has been developed on how to integrate disease specific interventions into broader public health systems. The challenges identified by some disease specific groups to fully integrate were also highlighted. NTD endemic countries, conversely, have generally reacted positively to developing an integrated approach, recognising that building integrated public health interventions into their health systems is easier than having individual disease-specific interventions.

The growing threat of dengue was used to highlight the need for collaboration with the vector control sector and to identify the challenges and the necessary cost that this incurred. .

He recognised the overarching importance of WASH interventions, which have been "a bit over our NTD disease-specific heads". The huge cost of investment is a challenge but this investment needs to be made.

He also recognised the importance of NTDs to map out *pockets of poverty*, and the prevalence of WASH a core indicator.

Dr Engels concluded by quoting Tim Evans (Director of Human Population and Nutrition at the World Bank), saying that "NTDs are the litmus test for how health issues will be dealt with by developing nations in the post 2015 agenda" , through the financing of public health interventions and how they can become part of national systems.

Dr Neira relayed the agreed importance of the WASH and health as indicators of effective development

Nichola Cadge, Health Adviser, DFID

Nichola Cadge highlighted DFID's ongoing commitment to NTD elimination by citing the example of current funding of the Nigerian NTD elimination programme, providing funding to control 7 NTDs.

She recognised the importance of strong national government leadership making a committed move to increase health budgets. However, a significant increase in national spending must be complimented by global donors as the current funding base remains too narrow. She also highlighted the additional challenges faced by elimination programmes due to failing security (Mali, South Sudan, CAR).

She concluded by highlighting that better integration across the NTD sector, as well as cross-sectorally (with specific mention of WASH) is urgently needed, ending by quoting Ban Ki Moon: "Poverty reduction and the elimination of NTDs go hand in hand".

Dr Ariel Pablos-Mendez, Assistant Administrator for Global Health, USAID

Dr Pablos-Mendez recognised the current momentum in the NTD agenda, the importance of the London Declaration on NTDs, and the commitment by international funders (both government and non-government) and endemic country governments to finance NTD control and elimination programmes.

He summarised the commitments USAID have made in the fight against NTDs. Namely investing over \$100 million annually in WASH (beyond public health funding) and providing technical support for integrated NTD programming in 25 countries.

He highlighted the need for effective monitoring and evaluation to demonstrate the impact of NTD investment and the important contribution of integrated programming to the value-for-money agenda with, for example, 30-40% savings in training costs and administration costs on integrated programmes.

Dr Pablos-Mendez concluded by noting that we are witnessing an increase in countries reaching middle income status and increasing ownership and domestic health investment by these countries in NTDs. USAID supports this and advocates for national governments to invest more in their own public financing resources.

Dr Neira noted that there is no way to address NTDs without focussing on the social and environmental determinants of health and continued the WASH theme, highlighting that without access to appropriate sanitation NTD elimination will not be possible.

Dr Wendy Harrison, Chair, UK Coalition against NTDs

Dr Harrison reiterated the need for cross-sectoral collaboration if the WHO 2020 roadmap goals were to be achieved, with the inclusion of all five public health strategies outlined by Dr Engels. She recognised that excellent guidance was in place for preventative chemotherapy and intensified disease management but that similar rigorous frameworks were needed to help bring together the five strategies into a comprehensive elimination approach. She stated that with limited resources available to the NTD community it was crucial to leverage the existing investments in the other sectors particularly water and sanitation. To do this most effectively it was crucial to and to understand the drivers and motivations for the implementation of the interventions by other sectors. She noted the importance of basing the framework on an evidence base. In terms of a health systems strengthening approach, Dr Harrison quoted the WHO SAFE strategy, as an example of 'diagonal'¹ programming that has maintained a focus on the elimination of trachoma but also has the broader benefit of systems strengthening. She also recognised that appropriate monitoring of the impact of NTD programmes, both positive and negative, on health systems needed to be become a routine and standardised.

Discussion

In the plenary discussions at the end of the side event, there were a number of contributions from WHO departments and from other ministries of health.

¹ See <http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/speech/2013/05/21/world-bank-group-president-jim-yong-kim-speech-at-world-health-assembly>

Some of the key points raised included:

- How NTDs programmes can be integrated with approaches to tackle non-communicable diseases (NCDs) to deliver shared programming.
- How we can influence other sectors and actors to partner in WASH interventions.
- Positive response to the suggestion of using NTDs as indicators of inequality and poverty.
- The challenges of partnership and the sheer number of partners in the NTD space and the need for strong leadership that ensures that partnerships are undertaken in line with country needs and under the guidance of the country's NTD Masterplan.
- Linking MDG 7 as a health-related goal.