



Neglected Tropical Diseases: No More Neglection

Dalia S Ashour*

Medical Parasitology Department, Faculty of Medicine, Tanta University, Tanta, Egypt

***Corresponding Author:** Dalia S Ashour, Medical Parasitology Department, Faculty of Medicine, Tanta University, Tanta, Egypt.

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The neglected tropical diseases (NTDs) are a group of chronic and disabling infections affecting the poorest people of the world, living in sub-Saharan Africa, Asia, and Latin America and keeping them in poverty because their illness unable them to work. They are termed “neglected” because they are largely confined to the most marginalized communities in the third world thus, most health care workers in developed countries are unfamiliar with NTD diagnosis and treatment. NTDs were “out of sight and out of mind”.

Previously, the three most deadly tropical diseases, malaria, tuberculosis, and acquired immune deficiency syndrome were considered as the NTDs. However, the World Health Organization (WHO) recognizes the following diseases as NTDs: 1) Parasitic diseases (accounting for more than 50% of all NTDs) such as leishmaniasis, African trypanosomiasis, Chagas disease, soil transmitted helminthiasis, schistosomiasis, cysticercosis, echinococcosis, lymphatic filariasis, Guinea-worm disease, 2) Bacterial infections as leprosy, trachoma and Buruli ulcer and 3) Viral infections such as dengue and dengue haemorrhagic fever [1]. In 2017, some other diseases have been added recently by the Strategic and Technical Advisory Group for Neglected Tropical Diseases including 1) Fungal infections such as podoconiosis and chromoblastomycosis, 2) Ectoparasitic infections like scabies and 3) Snakebite envenoming [2].

The collaboration between the WHO, non-governmental organizations, and pharmaceutical companies is the key to eliminate these diseases [1]. The WHO planned 2020 roadmap to eradicate or prevent transmission for NTDs. The implementation of this roadmap is mainly through focused integrated strategies including preventive chemotherapy on large scale, intensified case management and vector control. Other methods include health awareness and education, safe water supply and sanitation, capacity building through training and equipment [3].

WHO roadmap strategy targets NTDs:

- 1) Control of dengue fever, Buruli ulcer, cutaneous leishmaniasis, cysticercosis, echinococcosis, soil-transmitted helminthiasis.
- 2) Regional elimination of lymphatic filariasis, onchocerciasis, schistosomiasis, African trypanosomiasis, Chagas disease, visceral leishmaniasis, trachoma, leprosy, rabies and
- 3) Eradication of Guinea worm disease and yaws [4,5].

There was little financial incentive for pharmaceutical companies to develop or distribute new drugs or vaccines for NTDs till the “London Declaration on Neglected Tropical Diseases” which is a joint disease eradication program launched in 2012 in London with many pharmaceutical endorsers. It was inspired by the WHO 2020 roadmap to eradicate or prevent transmission of NTDs [3]. Therefore, many of these diseases have been controlled in many countries and on the way to reach the goal to eliminate 12 of the currently recognized NTDs by 2020.

Achieved progress against NTDs

Guinea worm disease was estimated to infect 3.5 million patients in 1986, 4619 patients in 2008 and only 25 cases were reported in 2016. Lymphatic filariasis was eliminated from eight countries in 2016 (Cambodia, Cook Islands, Maldives, Marshall Islands, Niue, Sri Lanka, Togo, and Vanuatu) and ten others are on the way of elimination. Onchocerciasis was interrupted in 11 of the 13 areas involved in the Americas and it has been controlled throughout much of sub-Saharan Africa. Visceral leishmaniasis was eliminated in 82% of subdistricts in India, 97% of subdistricts in Bangladesh, and all of Nepal in 2015. Trachoma was eradicated from Iran, Mexico, Morocco and Oman. Ghana and Nepal are on the way to eliminate it [6].

NTDs are now on the international agenda. They are no longer neglected, according to the WHO. The progress achieved to date prove that the interventions are immediate, technically achievable and cost-effective methods to control NTDs.

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